PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STOP SMOKING

TOBACCO COUGH—TOBACCO HEART—TOBACCO BREATH—TOBACCO NERVES...
NEW, SAFE FORMULA HELPS YOU BREAK HABIT IN JUST 7 DAYS

YOU CAN STOP

- Tobacco Nerves STOP
- Tobacco Breath STOP
- Tobacco Cough STOP
- Burning Mouth Due To Smoking STOP
- Hot Burning Tongue Due To Smoking STOP
- Poisonous Nicotine Due To Smoking STOP
- Tobacco expense

No matter how long you have been a victim of the expensive, unhealthful nicotine and smoke habit, this amazing scientific (easy to use) 7-day formula will help you to stop smoking—IN JUST SEVEN Days! Countless thousands who have broken the vicious Tobacco Habit now feel better, look better—actually feel healthier because they breath clean, cool fresh air into their lungs instead of the stultifying Tobacco *tar, Nicotine, and Benzo Pyrene*—all these irritants that come from cigarettes and cigars. You can't lose anything but the Tobacco Habit by trying this amazing, easy method—You Can Stop Smoking!

SEND NO MONEY

Aver. 1½-Pack per Day Smoker
Spends $125.90 per Year

Let us prove to you that smoking is nothing more than a repulsive habit that sends unhealthful impurities into your mouth, throat and lungs . . . a habit that does you no good and may result in harmful physical reactions. Spend those tobacco $$$ on useful, healthgiving benefits for yourself and your loved ones. Send NO Money! Just mail the Coupon on our absolute Money-Back Guarantee that this 7-Day test will help banish your desire for tobacco—not for days or weeks, but FOREVER! Mail the coupon today.

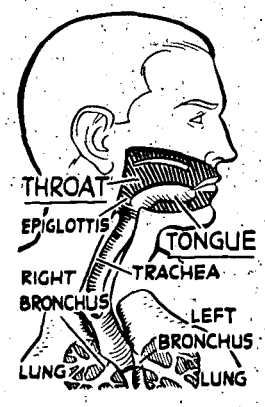
HOW HARMFUL ARE CIGARETTES AND CIGARS?

Numerous Medical Papers have been written about the evil, harmful effects of *Tobacco Breath, Tobacco Heart*, Tobacco Lungs, Tobacco Mouth, Tobacco Nervousness . . . Now, here at last is the amazing easy-to-take scientific discovery that helps destroy your desire to smoke in just 7 Days—or it won't cost you one cent. Mail the coupon today—the only thing you can loose is the offensive, expensive, unhealthful smoking habit!

ATTENTION DOCTORS:

Doctor, we can help you, too! Many Doctors are unwilling victims to the repulsive Tobacco Habit. We make the guarantee to you, too, Doctor. (A Guarantee that most Doctors dare not make to their own patients) . . . If this sensational discovery does not banish your craving for tobacco forever . . . your money cheerfully refunded.

YOU WILL LOSE THE DESIRE TO SMOKE IN 7 DAYS . . . OR NO COST TO YOU



Here's What Happens When You Smoke . . .

The nicotine laden smoke you inhale becomes deposited on your throat and lungs . . . (The average Smoker does this 300 times a day!) Nicotine irritates the Mucous Membranes of the respiratory tract and Tobacco Tar injures those membranes. Stop Tobacco Cough, Tobacco Heart, Tobacco Breath . . . Banish smoking forever, or no cost to you. Mail the coupon now.

Don't be a slave to tobacco. . . . Enjoy your right to clean, healthful, natural living. Try this amazing discovery for just 7-Days. . . . Easy to take, pleasant, no after-taste. If you haven't broken the smoking habit forever . . . return empty carton in 10 Days for prompt refund. Mail the coupon now.

STOP SMOKING—MAIL COUPON NOW!

DOCTOR'S ORDERS PRODUCTS
7-Day Tobacco Curb—Dept. 26
400 MADISON AVE., N.Y. 17, N.Y.

SENT TO YOU IN PLAIN WRAPPER

On your 10-Day Money-Back Guarantee send me Doctor's Orders 7-Day Tobacco Curb. *If not entirely satisfied I can return for prompt refund.*

- ☐ Send 7-Day Supply, I will pay Postman $2.00 plus Postage and C.O.D. Charges.
  Save 45c on C.O.D. Money Order Fee and Postage by sending cash with Order. Same Money-Back Guarantee applies.
- ☐ Enclosed is $2.00 for 7-Day Supply, you pay postage costs.
- ☐ Enclosed is $4.00 for 2 boxes of the 7-Day Supply for myself and a loved one. You pay postage costs.

NAME .....
ADDRESS ..... (Please Print)
TOWN ..... ZONE ..... STATE .....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INSIDE STUFF

By JUNE LURIE

THERE'S a little colored motion picture making the rounds, but it will never set any records for box office despite the fact that the critics are hailing it as "revolutionary". And yet it may influence, indirectly, more people than have ever before been affected by any film. It is the first motion picture ever taken inside a living, breathing heart!

This miracle of medical technology is just one more fundamental step taken in the direction of eliminating that worst killer of modern times—heart trouble. Medical technicians at the Montefiore Hospital in New York City have devised apparatus to permit the photographing of an animal's heart in full action. Connected to the animal's body was an artificial heart, so that the function of the living organ could be changed at will by turning over part of the task to the mechanical gadget.

The marvelous hydrodynamic muscular bulb of flesh and tissue has been analyzed, with the aid of the camera, in fine detail, so that every mysterious function of each valve and each fluid flow becomes clear. The next step will be, of course, an attempt to apply the same technique to the human heart, but since animal hearts are so similar, already a great deal has been learned.

The use of the motion picture camera and the television camera in medicine is becoming widespread. One permits the slowing down of motion, the other the observation, by large numbers of doctors, of any type of operation. The result is that the doctor of today is receiving training once thought inconceivable. In the specific case of heart medicine, these instruments are invaluable. With coronary thrombosis and other heart diseases exacting such a dreadful toll of human life, often under other names, it is of the utmost importance that we find out about the second most important human organ, the heart. Only the brain offers more mysterious relationships.

Up until now, examination of the heart has always been a matter of *post mortem*. Not so now; it's possible literally to pin down that organ on the dissecting table without hurting it. So far the conclusion is that a mechanical pump is like a horse and buggy compared with the few ounces of muscular tissue that drive our blood through our bodies!

Cycles -Cause And Effect

By Don Morrow

NO MORE misunderstood phenomenon exists in this world than that of periodic cycles. The scientists, statisticians and economists look at cycles and laugh. Conversely, the mystics look at them and believe. Actually, it should be the other way around—and some prominent mathematicians and scientists are investigating seriously this whole matter of cycles, attempting to deduce some reasonableness from them. For, unquestionably, cycles exist.

If you make a time chart of almost any historical observational fact, such as wars, fashions, depressions or sun-spots, winter temperatures or volcanic activity, check and observe these things, plotting them graphically against a time-axis, you discover an astounding thing. Incidence seems to rise and fall within almost definite cyclic periods, at a rate which simply precludes your ascribing these facts to chance.

This has troubled scientists, of course. How can you explain the uncanny behavior of utterly unrelated things? How can you say there is no connection between fashions and the frequency of wars?

Consequently, since it is impossible to ignore these related phenomena, numerous scientific institutions are seriously investigating cyclical matters, coordinating and charting them, arranging and cataloging diverse and apparently unrelated effects. The old law of cause and effect would appear to obtain between these things, and yet common sense tells us that it can't. Sometimes, even as the mystics recommend, it is better to throw out so-called "common sense" and refer to simple statistics.

With embarrassing accuracy, prognosticators have predicted—based on the observation of cyclical phenomena—such things as a minor recession, the explosion of various volcanoes, the next change in a fashion style. Orthodox scientific study does not ordinarily include such things, to say the least!

It is not beyond imagining that eventually regular institutes may be organized whose sole function will be the preparation of long-range predictive charts based on the observation of past cyclical matters. The future need not be unknown, since it seems that history does more than just repeat itself; it repeats itself with a regularity that without question indicates something more is operating than chance or the roll of Fate's dice!

FANTASTIC ADV. is published monthly by the Ziff-Davis Publishing Company at 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter July 30, 1937, at the Post Office, Chicago, Ill. under the act of March 3, 1879. Authorized by Post Office Department, Ottawa, Canada, as second-class matter. Additional second class entry Holyoke, Mass. Postmaster—please return undelivered copies under form 5579 to 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill. SUBSCRIPTION RATES: U. S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions, $2.50 for twelve issues; in British Empire $3.50, all other foreign countries $3.50 for twelve issues.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantastic Adventures

JANUARY, 1953

Reg. U. S. Pat. Off.

All Features Complete

WILLIAM B. ZIFF
Chairman of the Board and Publisher

B. G. DAVIS
President

VICE-PRESIDENTS

H. J. MORGANROTH
Production Director

LYNN PHILLIPS, JR.
Advertising Director

H. G. STRONG
Circulation Director

LOUIS ZARA
Associate Editorial Director

Secretary-Treasurer
G. E. CARNEY

Color Art Editor
HERMAN R. BOLLIN

Editor
HOWARD BROWNE

Managing Editor
L. E. SHAFFER

Associate Editor
PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Art Editor
LEO RAMON SUMMERS

INSIDE STUFF
By June Lurie 3

CYCLES — CAUSE AND EFFECT
By Don Morrow 3

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
By The Editor 6

THERE'S GOT TO BE ETHER
By Charles Recour 7

" 'COPTERS IS A-COMIN' "
By Sam Dewey 7

LITTLE GIANTS
By Joe Kleig 63

MAN IS BOSS?
By Mildred Low 63

BULLETS WITH BRAINS
By Omar Booth 91

PLANETS MADE TO ORDER
By E. Bruce Yaches 91

SNOW, BEAUTIFUL SNOW
By A. T. Kedzie 117

HISSING STARS
By Jon Barry 119

TINY TYPER
By A. T. Kedzie 119

OF MEN AND ICE WORMS
By Pete Boggs 121

HOW BIG IS SPACE?
By John Weston 123

MECHANICAL MAN
By Tom Edsman 126

THE LIFE SECRET
By Morris Small 126

MINERAL TROUBLE AHEAD
By Gene Snow 127

SPACE PROBLEM
By E. Bruce Yaches 128

JETS AWAY!
By Allen Yerby 129

MAIL TO THE AMATEUR
By Lee Gordon 130

EDITORIAL AND EXECUTIVE OFFICES, 366 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK 17, N. Y.

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: All communications concerning subscriptions should be addressed to *Circulation Dept., 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill.* Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address.

Copyright, 1952, by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

VOLUME 15 NUMBER 1

All Stories Complete

THE HOUSE THAT HATE BUILT (Novel—35,000) ..... by Peter Dakin 8

Illustrated by Ed Emsler

Deep in the Martian desert stood the sinister house of mystery. What violence would a tender bride find there upon her weird wedding night?

A CASE FOR MEPHISTO (Short—6,000) ..... by Frank McGivern 64

Illustrated by Dave Stone

Freddy was interested only in the gorgeous gal. He made a pass. Then all hell broke loose and Freddy found himself all mixed up with Satan

THE GODS OF MADNESS (Short—5,000) ..... by Chester S. Geier 76

Illustrated by Dick Francis

These Gods were invisible, yet as solid and tangible as granite. When the space explorers appealed to them for aid, the answer was mad laughter

THE RIM OF FAITH (Novelette—10,000) ..... by E. K. Jarvis 92

Illustrated by Frank Novarro

The only way Morgan could get to Mars was in the guise of a salesman. But even this masquerade could not protect him from Martian rage

Cover painting by Frank Novarro

CONTRIBUTIONS: Contributors are advised to retain a copy of their manuscripts and illustrations. Contributions should be mailed to the New York Editorial Office and must be accompanied by return postage. Contributions will be handled with reasonable care, but this magazine assumes no responsibility for their safety. Any copy accepted is subject to whatever adaptations and revisions are necessary to meet the requirements of this publication. Payment covers all author's, contributor's and contestant's rights, title, and interest in and to the material accepted and will be made at our current rates upon acceptance. All photos and drawings will be considered as part of the material purchased.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

DO YOU ever wonder what it must have felt like to be part of the 1852 scene in New York? You can get an idea by visiting the fascinating exhibition now being held at the Museum of the City of New York, which duplicates the streets of this city as they must have appeared a hundred years ago. The appearance, the sound, and even the atmosphere of those days can be experienced by strolling through the make-believe square on the third floor galleries—past the firehouse with its 15-foot double-decker, past the dry-goods store and general emporium and brownstone house.

LIFE-SIZED realistic-looking dummies dot the streets and can be seen in the buildings. There's a recording which plays, continuously reproducing the sounds of the street, the clatter of carriage wheels, the beat of the horses' hoofs and the shouts of the children.

THERE'S such an air of authenticity about the entire production that we had the feeling of attending an exhibition as we stepped out of the Museum onto Fifth Avenue, and watched our modern world pass in front of us.

LAST night was election night. Sitting right in our own living room with the few guests who were keeping watch with us on this memorable night, we couldn't help but contemplate how things had changed. For the first time, television was actually bringing the vote right into our own home, almost count by count. It seems strange to remember that less than three decades ago we couldn't know the results of a presidential election until we read the newspapers on the following day.

OVER the weekend we saw again a revival of the old German film classic "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari". This grotesque horror tale is still a thriller, and in our opinion, no lover of fantasy should miss it. Originally produced in 1919, this movie was the first to use abstract sets, and the results were revolutionary for its time. This was also the first time in movie writing where the action of a film was shown through the eyes of a madman. This was the only film of its type ever produced. The movie still carries a strong feeling of dramatic horror, and the new musical background which has been dubbed in for this re-issue adds materially to the feeling of drama.

ALTHOUGH Peter Dakin has been writing science fact fillers for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for almost two years, "The House That Hate Built" (this issue, page 8) is his first fiction effort and guaranteed to be the forerunner of a long and successful line. In this first novel, Mr. Dakin captures sinister mystery combined with a violence and tenderness that will make it impossible for you to put the story down before finishing it.

IF YOU want to know the age of a horse, you look at its teeth. If you want to know about a tree, you study a cross-section of its trunk. And now you can find out about the personal life of a fish by studying its scales.

TO BE the palm reader of the piscatorial world, you need the use of the recently developed Eberbach Fish Scale Projector. This is equipped with a special Bausch & Lomb projection microscope, and it magnifies and projects the minute markings on a fish scale. These markings—a pattern of rings—indicates to the fish expert the years the fish grew rapidly, what kind of life it led, where and when it spawned, what its weight and length were at any particular age, what it likes to eat, and other pertinent and personal data.

AND NOW, we're in a hurry to finish this editorial. Always ready and eager to prove our prowess in the culinary arts, we just got hold of a recipe for Mexican Wedding Cakes which we're going to try baking. Where's that chef's cap and apron—and the rolling pin?.....LES

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There's Got To Be

ETHER

THE FAMOUS Michelson-Morley experiment of the '80's caused a furor in physics, produced in a way *modern* physics, and together with Einstein's famous theory, it abolished the concept of the *ether* forever. In science today there is nothing as ancient as the ether, a concept now as dead as the dodo.

The ether, you will recall, was the hypothetical medium which permeated all space and which served as medium or carrier for the famous electromagnetic waves of Maxwell. According to Michelson, and any physicist, the path of the Earth through this all-permeating ether should be detectible by the fact that a relative velocity would be found. Michelson and Morley checked—and found none! This threw the whole field into an uproar. Until Einstein came along in 1919, it was a sore spot. Einstein's Theory of Relativity did away with the need for this theoretical medium. Instead of ether, the physicists now give us equations.

Recently, one of the world's most famous theoretical physicists, Dirac, inventor of wave-mechanics, showed that the ether not only may exist, but *needs* to exist! This startling announcement was backed up with cold analytical fact.

Dirac conceives of the ether as a tenuous medium almost like a vacuum with spotty electric charges in it. According to his calculations, this requires no further elaboration or confusion. Instead, it helpfully aids in explaining the transmission of light and radio waves through emptiness.

The idea is presented in mathematical terms, of course, and hedged with formidable symbols. But in essence, Dirac sees the velocity of the ether much as that of an electric charge in empty space. This explanation is no more helpful than the lack of ether was in understanding how waves go through nothingness. But the physicists are exhibiting great curiosity in the concept, and it may take its place along with quantum mechanics and wave-mechanics.

The wheel has come a full turn. From no-ether to ether through no-ether back to ether. What Michelson and Morley would feel about the shifting of view would be interesting, especially since their beautiful experiment seemed to prove so conclusively that there was no ether! Yet, it must be remembered that they didn't really prove the lack of ether. Rather, they demonstrated the lack of *velocity* of ether, a different thing entirely. —*Charles Recour*

"'Copters Is A-Comin'"

By SAM DEWEY

THERE can't be many Americans, living as they do in the most flourishing industrial paradise on Earth, who are unaware of the fact that the transportation revolution of the world lies in the helicopter! It requires no extraordinary technical skill to see that this is true, and the publicity coming from the battle fronts in Korea suggests that the helicopter is useful out of all proportion to its complexity or cost. In a word, the next decade should see the world "umbrellaed" by whirling rotors.

But we seem to have acquired a strange blase, bored attitude toward this miracle of locomotion, one completely at odds with the attitude with which the automobile, the airplane and the rocket were heralded. When these appeared in turn, thousands of amateurs took up the torch, and backyard mechanics worked overtime to produce working vehicles—with remarkable success, as witness Ford and the Wright brothers—or even the Rocket Society which produced the forerunners of the V-2. What, then, has happened today, with tools in everyone's hands, with mechanics down to a simple science rather than an art, and with materials available everywhere? Where are the Fords and Wrights of the helicopter?

Several amateurs, it is true, have built helicopters which have launched them into flourishing industrial activity to the point where they are now big business. But they can be counted on the fingers of one hand. There aren't hundreds of amateur helicopter builders as once there were of amateur builders of automobiles and airplanes. There are no helicopter "barnstormers". Have the American know-how and enthusiasm for mechanical marvels gone to pot?

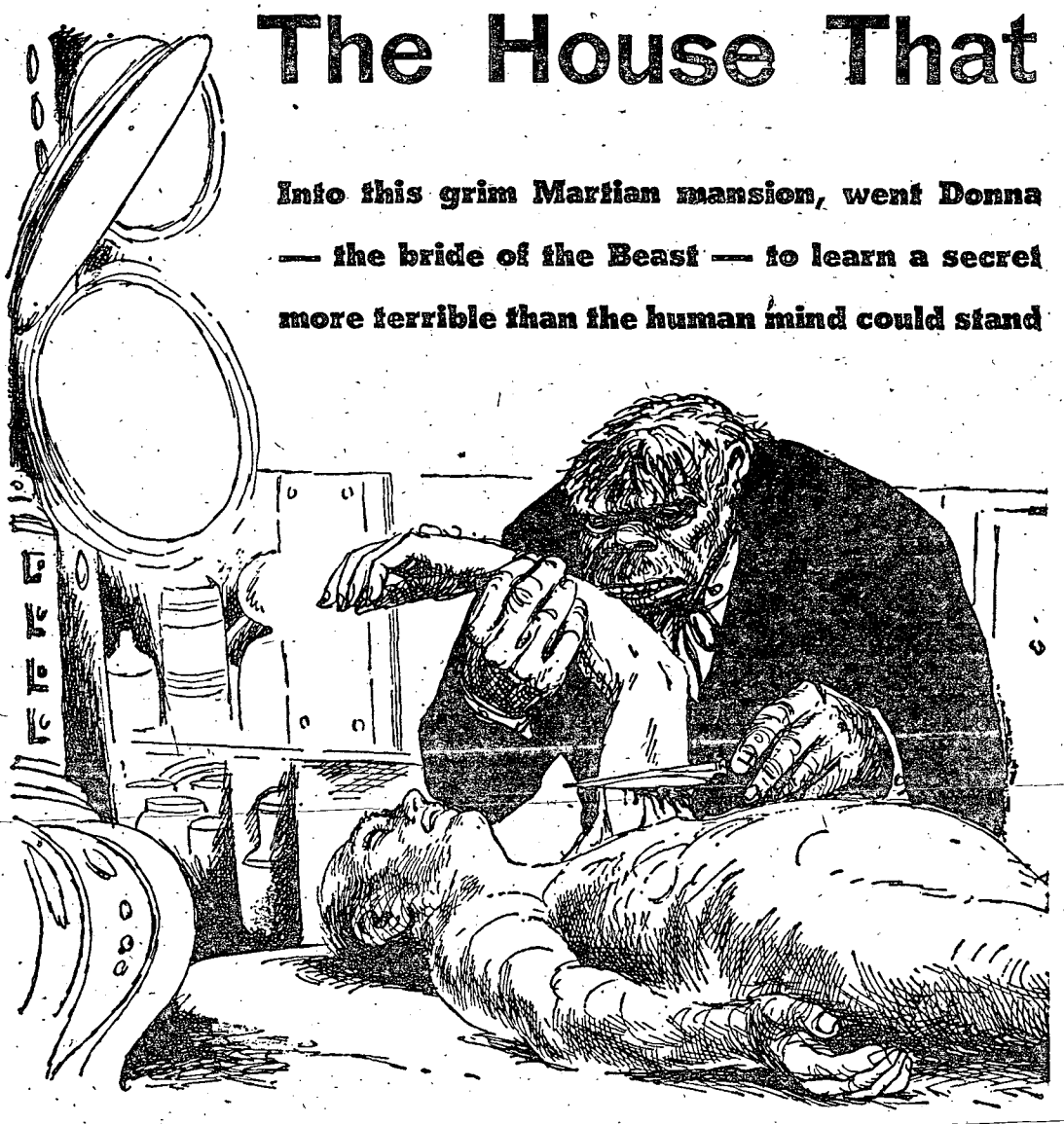
It would seem so, for you can't blame the lack of helicopter-consciousness either on complexity or on lack of knowledge. It is possible to build these flying eggbeaters. All that's required is interest and determination. To the lad who can construct a hundred-and-twenty-mile-an-hour "hot-rod", the mechanics of helicopters holds no mystery.

We have a private suspicion that this decade of ours will see an awakening of the enthusiasm that's needed and that eventually the skies will be flooded with helicopters, not all products of the mammoth factories but rather products of the backyard industrialist who has a feeling for tools and a knowledge that *his* skill can't be beaten. The sky should be filled with roaring rotors—let's hope this decade makes it so!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The House That

Into this grim Martian mansion, went Donna — the bride of the Beast — to learn a secret more terrible than the human mind could stand



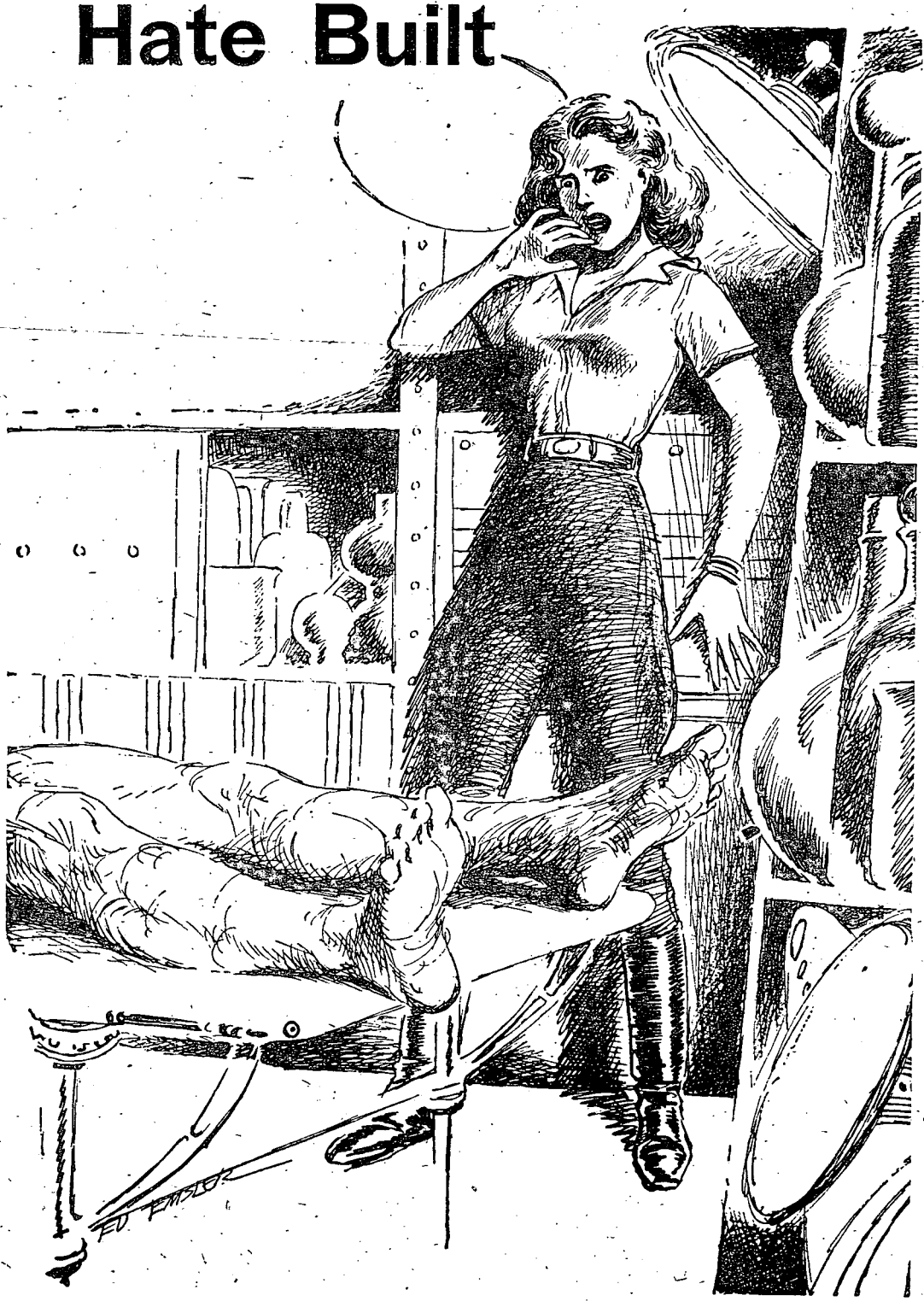
By PETER DAKIN

IT WAS WILD, forbidding, totally unfamiliar country into which the Earthman had strayed. Below, to the east, lay the broad red sand flats of the planet Mars. One day all this area would be known as New City, a great modern Martian metropolis. But now there was only a vast area of slowly shifting red sands. To the westward stood an impassable spine of mountains. One of these peaks had a name. Death Mountain, in memory of a group of Earth pioneers who had once strayed into this blind alley. The Earthmen realized their mistake too late as they turned to find several hundred Martian *arnos* blocking their return passage.

In the brief struggle, every Earthman was cut down. Their ears hung

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hate Built



Soon the man would be defiled by the mark of the Beast

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in a thick chain around the throats of their conquerors, their eyeballs decorated the primitive *arnos'* huts. And the peak that looked coldly down upon this slaughter was given a name: Death Mountain.

But that had been years before. Now there were no more Martian savages. They had learned to live with the Earthmen—to accept the physical differences between them. They had learned sublimation by these visitors from another planet. They had learned to stand by and watch silently as the strange visitors tore their earth, searching...always searching.... So that now the Earthman and his donkey was safe. There was only the silence, brooding and mysterious, and the occasional gentle whispers of the sands. There was only the mountain and the tortured broken slope at the mountain's base.

The Earthman was a bushy-faced, ageless creature—a desert rat, self-reliant miner, able to live and thrive on a strange planet where those less hardy would die with empty bellies while clawing at parched throats. His type had been a familiar sight during the old California gold-rush days back in the nineteenth century. They had long since died out. Now, in the pioneering of another planet, the digging for elusive treasures rumored to lie in the strange grounds, had given birth to them again.

For time unremembered, the man and the donkey had been plodding patiently up and down, back and forth, across the west, and they were more than man and beast. They were friends—companions—bosom pals as they stood against the perils of their unknown environment.

"I'll hit one of these days, pard," the man would say. "Just you watch. If a man keeps trying, he can't miss. He's got to hit it."

The man studied the peaks and the lowlands; he sniffed the wind and pushed his shovel into the foreign ground. He worked hard and developed what was almost a sixth sense, an instinct deep in his mind. The uranium that would make him a rich man was an ever-bright lure.

There was irony in the fact that it was the donkey who finally made the strike, not the man.

They had come to this wild place and the man was anxious to leave. There was none of the sign here—none of the indications he'd learned to watch for. "Got ourselves boxed in," he told the animal. "Waste of time fussing around here. We'll head higher up the range and have a try in the Mogo Hills section. The canals there...I've heard it told that there's a lot of the stuff buried there, if one could only get close to it."

The donkey was not averse to this. She flopped her ears at a buzzing *zart*, pawed the ground, and turned in answer to a shoulder prod from the man's walking stick.

But the man held back. "Wait a minute. What'd you dig up there? Let's have a look." He dropped to his knees, picked up a handful of sand and weighed it as he squinted at the donkey. "Pretty heavy stuff, baby. Maybe we've got something." He got off his knees and let the red sand dribble between his fingers. "Yeh. Maybe we really got something. We'll just stick around a spell and kind of investigate."

SOMEWHAT less than a year later, the man walked into the offices of a leading New York architect. He was dressed impeccably in a Brooks Brothers suit, his face was clean-shaven. He shook hands with a Mr. Parker and sat down beside the latter's desk. "My name's Hakin," he said.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Jimmy Hakin. I made a strike up Mars way. I can have anything in the world I want now. First, I want you to build me a house." He handed the architect an illustration torn from an ancient book. "I want you to build me this house. Wanted one like that ever since I was a kid."

Mr. Parker's eyes widened. He was looking at a picture depicting a scene on the Rhine River in Germany. Perched atop a cliff beside the river was a grim three-turreted structure. The picture was captioned, "Castle on the Rhine—1799". Mr. Parker laid the page down and stared blankly at his visitor. "You want—you want *this* built for you?"

"That's right," Jimmy Hakin replied cheerfully.

"Where? Where on earth could you build a house like this?"

"That's just it," Jimmy told him. "Not on Earth. I want it on Mars—I got the exact spot—right near my claim. It ain't a cliff exactly, but the house has got to be right on that exact spot." He leaned over the desk and tapped a finger against Mr. Parker's chest. "*Right on that exact spot*—and you better make sure of that."

"But—but, Mr. Hakin! The cost would be enormous. You must be out of your mind, man."

"No—I ain't out of my mind. I just know what I want. How much would it cost?"

"Why—why, I have no idea—why, at least five million. Maybe even more."

"That's just about what I figured." Jimmy Hakin grinned. "Got a couple of men waiting in your outside office. I'll call them in."

At his call, two huge Martians came in, lugging between them a bulky leather sack. Their green skins glistened with perspiration at the efforts they were expending to drag the heavy load. Their breathing was labored.

"Dump it out, boys," Jimmy Hakin ordered.

They opened the sack and poured the uranium particles out in five small mountains. "Think that'll do for a starter?" Jimmy asked.

AFTER JIMMY HAKIN departed, the stunned architect sat wiping his face and trying to collect his scattered wits. It had been spectacular, of course. But in these fantastic times, this was the sort of thing one had to learn to expect. Ever since space travel had opened up, man had reverted to pioneering. It seemed almost as if the veneer of civilization had palled to such a degree that, when the opportunity came to chuck it off, there were more than enough willing to make the dangerous and oftentimes futile voyage to a distant planet to seek their fortunes and build a new life. Many of them would bring their findings back to Earth, stay a while and enjoy their new wealth, but eventually they would be off again digging deep into strange lands, caught by the mystery of an alien people in an alien world.

Many, like Jimmy Hakin, would spend their wealth in bringing to the new planet what they always wanted to have on the old. They went crazy out there in the loneliness of a strange world. When opportunity afforded, they made reality of all the wild dreams they'd dreamed beside isolated campfires on lonely wastelands. Mr. Parker smiled. If Jimmy Hakin wanted a castle on Mars, that's what he'd get—a castle on Mars, built for him by the finest—and most expensive—architect on Earth.

After Jimmy Hakin had lived in his castle on the slope at the foot of Death Mountain for a year, he became very lonely. "A man should not be

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alone," he would say to himself. "A man should have a woman—and a son. The circle must be complete."

He used to go to the Martian village periodically to replenish his stocks, and on one of these trips brought back to the castle with him the daughter of one of the men with whom he traded. She was almost as tall as Jimmy, she had a beautiful figure. Her green skin was clear and flawless, her figure was beautiful. Had Jimmy been more observing, he would have noted that her slanting black eyes looked at him with revulsion and loathing when he bought her from her father. But he was not interested in this. Jimmy Hakin wanted a wife, and a son. He bought his wife; she went with him to his castle. She seemed to accept the monotony of her new existence, was entirely submissive to her husband. But once he found her beating one of the servants and was aghast at the viciousness with which she swung the whip. The *arnos* was bleeding from head to feet by the time Jimmy pulled the whip from her. Sometimes Jimmy would find her brooding eyes on him, studying him with a contemptuous fierceness. However, she never spoke her feelings and he could only guess at them.

She bore the son which was expected of her, and when Bruce Hakin was seven years old she died. From the time the boy was born until the time she died, she hardly spoke to Jimmy. She spent all her energies in playing with the child, in talking with him, teaching him, loving him. Her death to Jimmy was a release from a sullenness which he could not understand, and which he found overpowering. To the child it was a part of his life cut away.

YOUNG BRUCE was a handsome boy. He had his father's skin coloring, his mother's black hair and brooding, sullen, slanted black eyes. Because of his skin coloring, the Martian in him could not be detected. And the slanted eyes gave him a mysterious —almost glamorous—appearance.

A short time after the boy's mother died, Jimmy sent his son back to Earth for his schooling. He was fiercely determined that the boy should have a good education—and he was worried about the brooding intensity that the boy exhibited. Worried that, as a father, he could never seem to get close to the child.

During the years that followed, Jimmy lived alone in his fabulous castle at the foot of Death Mountain. He had, to a great extent, become a legendary character. He never revealed the source of his wealth, but that did not prevent others from searching. The regions about his castle were combed for uranium ore, and although some was found, no spectacular strikes were ever made. There was enough to support a town, however, and so New City was born on the flats some ten miles south of Jimmy's castle. This later grew into the famed counterpart of Earth's Paris. And the saloons in the early New City were never dry of talk and comment concerning the old eccentric in his turretted monstrosity at Death Mountain.

"I tell you, there's something damn queer about it. Remember how the story goes? What he said to that architect fellow in New York? *Right on that exact spot.* What for did it have to be right there? That slope's pretty big. Why couldn't the castle be at some other place?"

"Because that's where his strike was, you idiot. He built the castle right over it so all he'd have to do was go down in the basement when he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ran short of money. It's there!"

"Like hell it's there! His strike was somewhere else. Close maybe, and maybe further up in the hills. I'm telling you this, friend: there ain't no uranium under that castle and there never was."

"You're crazy. I'm dead certain the castle sits plumb over his mine."

And so it went, the legend growing with the years, the known details passed on from tongue to tongue.

Jimmy himself had never been unsocial, but now he withdrew more and more from the world. A somber, melancholy streak deep within him was being uncovered by the years. He stayed for weeks on end within the confines of the castle. He sat for hours at the high window overlooking the flatlands below shining brightly in the light from the twin moons.

THEN CAME the incident which gave a sinister tinge to the legend of Death Mountain Castle. Late one night, under the twin moons, three *arnos* presented themselves at the door and were admitted.

There are two kinds of Martians: the *rees* and the *arnos*. Jimmy's wife was a *rees*. They are the higher caste, and look very much like modern Earthman except for the color of their skins. They are generally a peaceful people and, except for a few underground movements, gave the Earthmen no fight. The *arnos* are the lower caste, the savagely wild groups. In the early days of space travel, Earthmen used to return with weird tales of the cannibalistic *arnos*. By now, however, they had for the most part been tamed. Although there were periodic marauding groups. Physically, except for his green skin, the *arnos* looked much like the primitive Neanderthal man of Earth, with his narrow sloping forehead and huge ape-like arms.

Not too long after the three *arnos* were received into Jimmy's house, the news was circulated around New City by a youth who had seen them enter the house. "I followed them—those three *arnos*. Know where they went? To Jimmy's castle, and he let them in! Wonder if he's friends with those gangsters."

"Why don't you just mind your own business? Jimmy's old enough to be friends with whoever he wants. And who says every *arnos* has to be a gangster?"

"Well, most of them are. I'm going to snoop around there to see if they left. Maybe I'll follow their tracks, to see just who they really are."

And so a new facet of the legend was born. The youth found no tracks leading away from the castle. It was whispered around that three *arnos*, desperate gangsters loaded with loot, had entered Death Mountain Castle and had never again been seen or heard of.

Jimmy went on as before. He made rare visits to New City, but no one asked any questions of him. It was more interesting to wonder and to speculate.

Jimmy Hakin was feeling his years now. He seldom left the castle. Finally, one day, he sat down and painfully composed a letter.

Dear Son:

Today is your twenty-first birthday. I would like for you to come home. I am not feeling too good, and I do not think I will last very much longer. There are some things I must tell you before I die. It is important that you know them. Come soon.

Your loving father,
Jimmy Hakin

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It had been three years since Bruce Hakin had been to Mars. He caught a rocket at the LaGuardia Spaceport in New York, making one change at the Moon Way-Station before reaching New City.

His father was in bed when he arrived. "Nothing serious, son. Just tired. I'm weary clear down to my bones. Let me look at you, son. Let me look at you."

JIMMY gazed with pride and love at his son—at the tall, handsome youth, who looked back at him through thick-lashed, almost hypnotic eyes.

"How you coming with the book-learning, son? Still want to be a doctor?"

The boy looked at his father coldly, impersonally. "That's right, sir. I want to be a surgeon. I'd like to set up practice someplace in the United States, probably New York."

Jimmy sighed. "I figgered you might not want to live here, in this tomb. But I did kind of hope you'd settle around these parts somewhere. Medical men are needed here bad. And after all, son, the Martians are your people too."

"They are not my people," Bruce Hakin said with a startling bitterness. "I have no people."

Strangely, the old man did not challenge this statement. He didn't even appear to have heard his son. He said, "I'm sorry to break in on your book-learning, boy, but I don't think I'll be around much longer, and there's a couple of things I got to tell you."

"Your heart?" Bruce asked, in a flat, professional voice.

Jimmy nodded. "Old ticker's giving out. And other things is bad too, son. First off, I'm just about broke."

Bruce Hakin pulled up a chair and sat staring into his father's face.

"You see, that strike I made paid off big, son. Over eight million dollars. I went along for quite a spell, thinking it would never end. That's a right lot of dough. But it did end—a good many years ago. It sounds like a lot of money, but the things I bought with it were big too. Like this house. It's the biggest damned house in the universe, I guess. I raised me a son and educated him, and—"

"Just what do you mean by saying you're broke," the youth cut in. "It's a comparative term, really. A millionaire with hundreds of thousands left considers himself broke."

"Oh, there's some left. Enough to finish your schooling and set you up some place. Or enough to let you live here in the house for a good long spell without your having to worry." Jimmy Hakin closed his eyes. Then he opened them and continued: "Guess I was kind of hoping you'd get to love the place like I do and want to stick around. It kind of grows on you, son."

Bruce Hakin looked around the great stone-walled room with distaste. "You yourself called it a tomb."

"Didn't mean it, though. You see, boy, there's some things about this old rock-pile I never told anyone—things I'm the only living soul that knows. For instance, why it had to be built right where it is."

The old man came slowly to a sitting posture, then pushed his legs over the edge of the bed. "Got to get up now," he said. "Time's come to unload all my secrets and show you what you're going to inherit."

Bruce Hakin sat silent, watching his father crawl painfully into pants and boots. At length the old man straightened, tested his legs and said, "All right. I'm ready, Bruce. Let's go, son."

Without speaking a single word, Bruce Hakin followed his father to the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

door of the medieval bed chamber.

IT WAS about two days later that Jimmy, watching his son pacing the floor for hours on end, said to him: "What's on your mind, son? What's weighing you down? Anything I can do about it?"

"I can hardly be cheerful upon discovering that I'm practically a pauper." Bruce turned to look at his father with fierce resentment.

"That isn't it, boy. I could see this thing in you before I told you about the money. What is it? What's eating at you?"

The boy's face paled. He controlled it well, but there was sheer rage boiling in him—thick, clotted bitterness. "All right—if you must know! It's you! You! That's what's bothering me. The thing you are, and what my mother was, and what it's done to me!"

Now it was Jimmy Hakin's turn to show a dead-white face. "I—I don't get you."

"Oh yes you do. You're a famous man, widely famous. The story of you and your goings-on are known on every planet and way station in the universe. It probably wouldn't have mattered if you'd kept me here, buried in this stone nightmare of yours. But no! I had to be educated. I had to go out into the world, and when I got to Earth—to New York—I found I was famous. Everybody from bootblacks to bank presidents knew me as Jimmy Hakin's son!"

"Well now, boy. Is that so bad? Seems to me there's lots of people like being famous."

"Sure. But not as the son of a crazy desert rat who ought to be in an asylum. You gave me that background, and then took away the one cushion I'd have against it. Money. It doesn't matter what people say about you when you have money, but now I've got to go among them and depend on them for my living. I've got to hope for the opportunity to take out their appendix and hold their wives' hands when they have stomach aches!"

"Look, son. You look here now. You're taking this a mite too serious. It isn't near as bad as all that."

"Oh, isn't it?" Bruce Hakin turned his voice into a mincing mimicry. "'Doctor Bruce Hakin? And who might he be? Oh, haven't you heard? He's a half-breed. His father was a crazy old desert rat who built a German castle out on the Martian desert. Mad as a loon. And his mother! Oh, my dear! His mother was a Martian *rees* and his father bought her and then took her into the desert to breed a son, just the way you breed a cow! Just because his skin isn't green—'"

The last words were smashed back into Bruce's teeth. He fell prone on the floor and lay there in sudden terror. So great and terrible was the rage in Jimmy Hakin's face and frail body, that for the first time in his life his son knew mortal fear.

Jimmy Hakin was groping blindly for a weapon, a chair, anything to smash the life out of his son. "You rotten, filthy, ungrateful—"

His hands touched a chair, but he did not lift it. Sudden pain came bubbling up from his chest, clutched at his throat and choked him. He trembled, staggered, and fell like a falling tree across the body of the man he had sired and now wanted to kill.

The youth reached out and laid a hand against the withered neck. There was no pulse-beat.

Jimmy Hakin was dead.

Bruce shoved the body aside and got to his feet. He took a handkerchief and carefully wiped the blood from his mouth. Then, he went to the door and yelled down the great stairwell at the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

top of his voice. The yell brought an old Martian servant who entered the room and gave a stifled cry as he moved forward to Jimmy's body.

"There is nothing you can do," Bruce Hakin told him. "My father died of a heart attack. I did my best to save him, but it was impossible."

FIFTEEN years after Jimmy Hakin was laid to rest on a foggy slope of Death Mountain, a slim, tawny-haired beauty named Donna King crossed Fifth Avenue in New York City and entered a fashionable brownstone mansion. A maid took her things.

"Is he still in his room?" the girl asked the maid.

"That he is, Miss Donna. All day long, pacing up and down with the door locked. Your mother went to bed with a nervous headache, she's that upset. It must be something very bad to make him act so strange."

"I'm going to talk to him. He's got to let me in."

Donna King mounted the stair knocked on a heavy, oaken door. "Father? Are you in there? Open the door. It's Donna. I must talk to you."

When the door opened, the girl was startled by what she saw. Her father had changed. In the hours since she'd last seen him, he appeared to have aged twenty years. The haggard, harried expression he wore was entirely new to the girl. Without doubt, there was something deadly serious behind this.

"Father, what is it? What's done this to you? Tell me! I've got a right to know." She led him to a lounge, sat him down and dropped beside him. "Tell me, Father," she said, and pushed the gray hair up off his forehead.

Charles King sat silent for some time. Then he straightened and smiled wearily at his daughter. "You'll know before long, anyhow," he said. "So I might as well tell you before you see it in the papers. I'm through, Donna. I'm bankrupt. The firm of Charles King and Company is about to fail."

Her first reaction was one of relief. She laughed and put her soft cheek against his. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, scaring us like this. Mother's upstairs with a sick headache. We thought it was something serious."

He turned and looked into her fine blue eyes. "You mean your father's going bankrupt is of no great importance?" he asked softly.

"Of course it's important, silly. But it can't be as bad as you make out. It isn't a matter of life or death. You and Mother and I will get along. After all, it's only money, darling. I'll go to work and we'll move into a two-room flat. People don't die when they move off Fifth Avenue."

His weariness seemed to increase. "Only money, Donna? You're wrong, child. It's far more than that. Thirty years of my life, for one thing; my integrity, for another. The name of Charles King has been something to be proud of. My word is my bond on Wall Street, and my name is respected in money markets all over the world. All that will go. And possibly jail. One never knows what course things take."

"No! That's absurd, darling. Your worst enemy knows you're honest."

Charles King's shoulders slumped lower as he stared across the room. "The bankruptcy proceedings are hardly preferable to jail. You sit in a circle of grim-faced men, and they ask you what you own. To all intents and purposes, you take your cuff links off and put them on the table together

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with your watch and chain. The referee says: Charles King, your debts are legally repudiated. You have no money, but you have no self-respect, either. Your creditors have cut it up and each of them has taken a piece."

"Father! Stop it! The referee says no such thing!"

"He might just as well."

"But we don't have to go through bankruptcy. We'll pay off. We'll pay off every cent."

AT FIRST, the light tone of her voice came naturally, from relief, but now she had to force it, as the truth hit her squarely. Her father would never survive this blow to his pride. Bankruptcy or not, he would die under the weight of his shattered integrity.

For a moment, she knew helpless panic. Then, she steadied herself. Something could be done. There was always a way. She thought, quite naturally, of Jack, then dismissed his image from her mind. Jack had no money to stave off a disaster of this kind. Nor would he have any way of laying hands on such an amount of money.

She had to be alone to think this out. "You get some rest, darling," she said. "Lie back and close your eyes. And don't worry. We'll find a way out." She left him and went slowly to the door and out into the hall.

There she found the maid, Nora, waiting for her. There was an ill-concealed excitement about her—an almost conspiratorial air. "I wanted to call you," the maid said. "But I was afraid to interrupt, so I waited."

Donna frowned, only half hearing the girl. "What is it, Nora?"

"That man, Miss Donna. That dark handsome man that's been following you."

"What are you talking about, Nora? No one has been following me."

The maid's eyes widened. "You mean you don't know? Why, I've seen him several times out the window. He walks along behind you and when you come into the house, he goes on real slow. I never said anything because I thought maybe you—" the girl stopped in confusion.

"You're imagining things, Nora. I'm going to my room now and I don't want to be bothered."

"But he's downstairs now, Miss Donna! He's waiting for you in the drawing room."

"This is idiotic, Nora. Send him away."

"Please, Miss Donna. You send him away. I—I'm almost afraid of him. He has such strange eyes."

Donna King shrugged her lovely shoulders impatiently. "Well—you shouldn't have let him in. You know you should be careful. Maybe he's already gotten away with the silver. I'll see to him." And she hurried toward the stairs.

When she entered the drawing room, her manner and attitude were openly hostile. She had intended to order the man from the house without any preliminaries. But something pushed the thought from her mind.

He was facing the door, seated erect on a straight-backed chair. His hands were resting on the knob of a shining black cane. Immediately, he arose and bowed. "So nice of you to receive me, Miss King."

There was an arresting, deeply vibrant quality in his voice. In fact, everything about him was arresting. He was as handsome a man as Donna had ever seen. Somewhere in his thirties, she judged, with black hair and a dark, flawless complexion. But it was the man's eyes which held her attention. They were a flashing black, slanting with a seeming power of their own.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They blinded an observer to any structural weaknesses in his face.

"What did you wish to see me about?"

"Something of very great importance. My name is Bruce Hakin. If you would give me a few minutes—"

"I'm very busy, Mr. Hakin. If you could come back another time—my father is ill just now."

"My business indirectly concerns your father."

Donna instinctively distrusted this man. This distrust, coupled with her first impression of frank dislike, kept her beautiful face cold, her eyes wary, as she said, "Please be seated. What is it you want?"

He sat down. "I'll be frank and to the point, Miss King. It has come to my knowledge that your father faces financial ruin. Within two days at the most, his firm will close its doors."

"How do you know this? What business is it of yours?"

"That's what I've come here to explain."

"Just a moment," and Donna frowned in quick thought. "Hakin. Bruce Hakin, I believe you said. It seems to me the name is familiar. I must have—"

"You've heard the name before, I'm sure," he cut in, his voice brittle. "Bruce Hakin, whose father was utterly mad. Son of Jimmy Hakin, the miner who built a castle in the desert and who played the fool generally. Whose mother was a—"

"I'm sorry if I appeared rude. I didn't mean to—"

"It's perfectly all-right."

He had adroitly put her on the defensive. He sensed her uneasiness as she said, "I'm sorry I interrupted you. Please go on."

"It can be stated in a few words, Miss King. I am a very wealthy man and I wish to help your father."

TO DONNA there was something unreal about all this—as if it were a bad dream—as if it weren't really happening at all. Strangely, everything about her had faded, and she suddenly realized her whole attention was centered in those magnificent black eyes. She brushed a hand across her forehead. "I can scarcely be other than grateful," she said, "but I'm hardly the person to talk to. Shouldn't you discuss it with my father?"

"No. You and I are the principals involved. To me, your father is merely the means to an end."

"I—I don't understand."

"My proposition is simple. It is this: I want to marry you. I am deeply in love with you, but I don't wish to go through the formalities of a courtship with the possible risk of your rejecting me in the end. Therefore, I offer you a bargain. If you will marry me, I'll get your father out of trouble and put him back on his feet. It's as simple as that. A favor to you for one in return."

Donna swayed backward slowly in her chair. It seemed, suddenly, that a haze fell over everything—that there were thick clouds rolling and pitching. And from somewhere beyond came a cackle of insane laughter.

She sought hot searing words with which to reply, but she couldn't find them. And the words that finally came to her to be her own. "But—it's absurd! I already have marriage plans. I'm engaged to Jack Barron. In three months, we—"

"I am not interested in any of your previous attachments. Our life will begin here—now!"

She felt her reaction should be one of anger, but something within her

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had been dulled. There was no sharpness in her mind. Something, she felt, had been taken away from her. All she experienced was amazement and an odd feeling of hysteria. She closed her eyes.

"It's—it just can't be happening. Not this. It's like something out of a play—a bad play."

He ignored her remark. "This isn't as abrupt as it appears to be, Miss King. I saw you for the first time two months ago as you were crossing Fifth Avenue. I knew instantly you were the only girl I would ever want for my wife. Naturally, I made inquiries and investigations. My resources are extensive. I have many sources of information. Thus, your father's difficulties came to my attention, and the rest followed logically."

For Donna there was a touch of horror in this revelation. "Then you can't be the only one who knows. The condition of his company must be pretty well known on Wall Street."

"I assure you his failure will come as a distinct surprise to everyone."

DONNA'S EYES had remained closed, and now her head was clearing. Obviously, she had suffered a greater shock from this affair than she'd realized. She heard Bruce Hakin's low, magnetic voice singing in her ears.

"A quick sketch of my background would not be out of place here," he said. "As I told you, I am extremely wealthy. I've traveled extensively on this planet, and have lived at one time or another in almost every country. I am a surgeon; but I have never practiced this skill. I was born on Mars. I own, among other things, a grotesque castle which my father built right outside of New City, on Mars. I spend a great deal of my time there. That's where I will take you immediately after our marriage."

This last pricked sharply into her brain. Her eyes snapped open and she came to her feet. "Please go, Mr. Hakin. Go at once, or I'll be forced to have you thrown out."

Bruce Hakin was already on his feet. "Certainly, if you wish it. But let me say this: there is no other way to stave off disaster. No one will come to your father's rescue. If you refuse my offer, he will go down the drain. As a matter of fact, I'm sure he will commit suicide. Basically, your father is a very weak man."

"I said *get out!*"

He got as far as the door, then turned back. "I'm at the Waldorf," he said. "You can get me there at any hour. I'll wait two days." He opened the door and set his black derby carefully on his head. "After that, of course, there will be nothing even I can do for your father. Good night, Miss King."

The next twelve hours were to stand out in Donna's memory; not as a result of events around her, but because of what went on in her own mind and heart.

First came the wave of hot, burning indignation. Then, she found grounds for shame in her own actions. How could she have let the man even make such an offer? It seemed unthinkable, now, that she hadn't cut him off the instant he uttered the proposal. She cringed at the thought of her insane, feeble reply. *"I already have marriage plans. I'm engaged to—"* Donna remembered that hours later and buried her hot face in her pillow. She lay there thinking of how she'd let him go on, insufferably cocksure, telling her all about himself.

THEN HER mind drifted back to her father's plight and she re-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

membered another thing Bruce Hakin had said: *"As a matter of fact, I'm sure he will commit suicide."*

He won't! Donna told herself fiercely. He's not that kind! He's a fighter and no matter what happens, he'll go on fighting! But she realized her vehemence on this score did not stem from certainty. She kept repeating it in order to convince herself. This brought a sick panicky feeling from which she sought comfort in thoughts of Jack Barron. Patient, plodding, honest Jack. She longed for the comfort of his arms. Finally, in the early morning, she went to sleep.

She awoke far too soon and found grim reality waiting for her. Her first conscious thought was: would he actually do it? Does his reputation mean so much to him that he'd kill himself? No, of course not. We'll find a way out of all this.

She got out of bed, put on a robe and went into the hall. It was morning, early morning, and the house was deathly still. She went to the door of her father's room, opened it softly and looked inside. He was stretched on the lounge, still in his clothes. He was sleeping. She went inside, closed the door softly, and tiptoed across the room. She stared down at his tired, worn face, and her mind was full of sudden bewilderment. How could this thing have happened to him so suddenly? He'd never been in trouble before. Charles King and Company had always been as solid as any firm in Wall Street. And now, out of a clear sky— But they'd make out. She turned away slowly.

As she did so, her eyes fell upon the half-open drawer of her father's desk. She stopped, paled, and caught her breath. The thing lay there partly concealed under some papers, a shining, nickel-plated revolver. The sight of it chilled her to the bone because she was certain the gun had not been there two days previously. She picked it up, slipped it into her pocket and went out of the room.

Donna was not thinking clearly now, but there was no hesitation in her movements. She went down the stairs and into the library. She picked up the telephone and called the Waldorf Hotel and asked for Mr. Bruce Hakin.

When he answered, she said, "This is Donna King. I'll accept your proposition."

"Thank you, my dear," he replied. "If you'll meet me here at ten o'clock —in the lobby—we can discuss the details."

DONNA KING was married to Bruce Hakin on the afternoon of that day. Within twenty-four hours, she and her husband were aboard a space-ship bound for Mars.

On the following morning, a bewildered young New Yorker named Jack Barron received a brief note written in a feminine hand.

Dear Jack:

Today I married Bruce Hakin. I am leaving New York immediately. I am going to live on Mars with my husband. I am sure this is for the best.

Yours,

Donna.

First, of course, came disbelief. This was a joke. This couldn't be so. It was easy enough to verify, however.

"You're surprised? Well, after all— I'm Donna's mother, and even I didn't know anything about it until after she was married. I can't understand young people nowadays; not even to tell her own mother. Jack, I'm so sorry. We always liked you, Jack . . ."

Jack Barron got drunk. He got

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drunk and had quite a time blowing off steam. He sat at one bar after another telling it to anyone who would listen.

"Bruce Hakin! Who the hell is Bruce Hakin? What the hell right has he got to come to Earth to steal my girl? I'll bust him wide open, that heel! That's what I'll do! He's that character with a castle someplace on Mars. He can have his damn castle, but he can't have my girl. There's something damn funny about this, and I'm the guy who's going to find out. I'll get to the bottom of it. I was going to be an accountant. I studied like hell. Going to make a real career out of it. But not any more. I'll make a career of this monkey Hakin. I'll get to the bottom of what's going on."

Barron sobered up finally, as all men must, and rechecked his ambitions. He discovered that what he'd said still went. He'd lost interest in accountancy. He'd lost interest in New York. He'd lost interest in Earth. He yearned for only one thing—the slim frosty-haired girl he'd been planning to marry. And from this yearning sprang another. Never having been a particularly adventurous man, he was now nevertheless yearning for a vague mysterious place called Mars, a place far out of Earth's orbit, a place where even today not too many of Earth's sober and stable citizens ventured. Yes, Jack Barron swore, he was going to find out about this Bruce Hakin. He was going to find out about the man who had actually abducted his girl.

IT WAS LATE in the evening. The lights were on in the branch of the Moore Detective Agency located on the moon. Five men were gathered there. Three of the men had about them the aura of money and success. By comparison, the clothing of the other two was shabby. Behind a desk sat William Moore, one of the shabbier two. He waved a hand, making introductions.

"Gentlemen, this is Joe Kane, the man working on your case. I called him in tonight. Joe, Mr. Nages, Mr. Smith, and Mr. Brooks, all of Universal Wide Indemnity." Kane sat down in the room's one remaining chair while Moore finished crisply, "The people who are footing the bills."

Joe Kane was a balding, tired-looking, middle-aged man, who did not look his role of detective. He remained silent, evidently waiting for questions.

Nages, the spokesman for the group, was a heavy, bull-jawed man with a voice out of keeping with his bulk—a shrill, feminine voice. "I can assure you," he said to Kane, "that we are far from satisfied with the progress you've made. Our company is faced with a million-dollar liability from two successful space hi-jackings. We hired you to apprehend the criminals. Where are your results? I've studied your written reports; they make bad reading. The identity of the robbers seems pretty generally known. Why don't you make an effort to track them down? It seems to us you've gone off in a blind alley with your fantastic theories about a Martian castle and a man named Bruce Hakin."

Kane, waiting patiently for Nages to finish, took a notebook from his pocket and thumbed through the pages.

"I gather from your reports," Nages said dryly, "that you believe this Hakin to be some sort of mass murderer."

"If you consider that to be a stated fact," Kane said, "you read what wasn't written."

Nages reddened and William Moore broke in hastily: "I suggest you let Joe give you the whole history of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the case, Maybe the other gentlemen haven't followed the reports as closely as you have, Mr. Nages."

"That's what we're here for," Nages snapped. "A complete report. You have the floor, Kane."

THE DETECTIVE arose and stood with the open notebook in his hand. "You're quite right in saying the men involved in the two robberies are known. Not positively, of course, but space hi-jackers are individualists. Each one works differently, and even when they band together for a job, they leave their own personal touches behind. Usually, on the strength of these signs, we can pick the right men up. Convicting them is another matter, but we're always sure we have the right men."

"You haven't told us a thing," Nages said.

Kane ignored the interruption. "In the case of these two robberies, however, we can't get hold of the men responsible because they've disappeared."

"Do you expect them to walk in and surrender? Why don't you go out and look for them?"

"We have looked for them. There isn't a known criminal in the universe that I can't put my hands on in forty-eight hours, under ordinary circumstances. But in this case, something out of the ordinary has happened. It's the same thing that has happened several times before over a period of years."

Nages opened his mouth to speak, but Kane held up a hand and continued to talk: "Let me give you an example. Let me cite just one case. Over two years ago, a rocket ship was hi-jacked about 14 hours from the Moon station. The loot ran to about $100,000 in gold, and about $500,000 in uranium. I'm positive that the two thugs who pulled the job are Grash-Del-oby, the Martian *arnos*, and Pedro Gonzales, the Mexican. I'll swear to it. I know it like I know my own name. So I went after them. Officially, I've been after those two ever since. But there hasn't been a whisper, a sign, or a shadow of either man from that day to this."

"How do you know that? They could be anyplace in the universe."

Kane shook his head. "It's my business to know more about criminals than the clothes they wear. I know their traits and I know their habits. Even if I couldn't catch them, I'd get word over the grapevine that one or both of them had appeared someplace—whether it be Earth, Mars, the Moon itself, or any of a dozen satellites.

"But that hasn't happened. Criminals don't desert their old haunts, even when the law is after them, and neither Grash nor Gonzales showed up anywhere in the last two years. It's just like they'd faded into thin air."

"Very well," Brooks said. "But where does this Bruce Hakin fit into your picture?"

"Quite some time ago, I noticed a strange thing. In a large percentage of these disappearance cases, the criminals were traced to a locality in Mars—a town called New City. In every case that I followed, the trail ended there. Just as if each one of them had dug a hole in the Martian sands and crawled in." Kane paused to take a cigar from his vest pocket. "And, gentlemen," he said, "there may be more truth in that than you think."

"You still haven't mentioned Hakin, Kane."

"Well, just wait a minute. I'm coming to him. You see, Hakin's father was an eccentric. All of you men must have heard of him at one time or another. He took millions out of a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

uranium mine right near where New City is now, and he used some of them to build a castle right over the spot. The place has turrets, dungeons, foot-thick stone walls—everything in exact duplicate of some castle standing on the Rhine River in Germany. The old man died, of course, and his son, Bruce Hakin, inherited the monstrosity."

"But how do you tie the castle in with your disappearing men?"

"Because of a story I heard when I first went to Mars—a story concerning Jimmy Hakin, Bruce's father. Years ago, when Jimmy was still alive, three suspicious-looking *arnos* turned up in New City. One night—after hanging around one of the local saloons for a week, they went to Jimmy Hakin's castle. They went inside and, so far as anyone knows, they never came out."

BROOKS, WHILE not hostile, was singularly unimpressed. "Rather a wild tale to base any activities on, isn't it? Entirely unverified."

"But I did verify it as much as possible. They were followed that night by a boy from New City. I got his name and looked him up. Of course, he's an old man now, but he's pretty definite about what he saw. He's willing to swear the three *arnos* went into the place."

"There are still holes in it. You say the castle is in the desert—"

"Not exactly. It stands on the lower slope of a mountain. Death Mountain, they call it."

"I see. But they could have left unseen. It's possible, isn't it?"

"As things stand, I'll have to admit it's probable. But my suspicions are not based on that incident. It served only to start a train of thought. There are other things: some fact, some rumor. For instance, the old-timers have it that Jimmy Hakin's money ran out—that his mine, wherever it was, stopped paying off, and that Bruce Hakin inherited comparatively little except the castle itself. Yet, today, the man is a financial giant. I'm of the opinion he's worth at least ten million, though I may be wrong. He studied medicine, but he never set up a practice. Where does his money come from?"

"It's merely a rumor," Nages said, "that his father's mine ran out. It seems to me that most of what you have is rumor."

Kane went on, completely unruffled: "I've made a study of Bruce Hakin. I've followed him all over our universe and his activities, to say the least, are strange. He's lived, at one time or another, on Mars, on the Moon, and on Earth. Yet, he has no apparent business connections anywhere except New York where he's sometimes active on Wall street. There are things I want to know about Bruce Hakin. I haven't been able to find out. I want to know what he does on the Moon, what he does on Earth. I've followed him all over. So far as I could determine, he does nothing but lounge around and take the air."

Brooks' eyes were aglow with excitement. Possibly Nages was not enjoying this, but Brooks was. The other visitor, Mr. Smith, took no part. He merely sat and listened.

Brooks now had a suggestion. "Wouldn't it be simpler to get into that Martian castle somehow and have a look around?"

"I've been in there," Kane admitted.

"And what did you find?"

"Nothing that I was looking for. I prowled around for several hours when Hakin was away on a trip. He has a housekeeper and a handyman, but it wasn't hard to avoid them. The place is immense."

"And you found nothing?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No dead bodies, if that's what you mean. There are at least thirty rooms in the castle, and five or six dungeons on the level beneath. There are even chains fastened to the walls in the dungeons, and a sort of arena down there, where the torturers of the Spanish Inquisition would feel right at home."

"What does he do with thirty rooms?"

"Only a few of them are furnished. Most of them are empty. Bare stone walls and stone floors. I know, because I went through every one of them. I drew a blank."

"Amazing," Mr. Brooks said in a hushed voice.

"One more thing," Joe Kane continued. "Even if I'm wrong about all these men vanishing, I have one positive disappearance to go on. I know one man vanished. About a year ago, there was another private detective on Hakin's trail. An operative named Mike Kelly. I know beyond doubt that Mike went into that castle. He hasn't been seen or heard of since."

"Why wasn't an investigation made?"

Kane shrugged. "Questions were asked. But they were polite questions and led to nothing, because Mike Kelly could not be definitely traced into the castle."

"Then here again," Nages snapped, "you have no proof."

"I have my own intelligence."

Nages sighed laboriously. "It's been a most entrancing story, but we didn't come here to be entertained. We want to know when we can expect results. What are your plans for the future?"

"I have a plan. I've been formulating it for some time. But I'd rather not give out the details just now."

"In other words," Nages cut in acidly, "you want us to go on blindly shelling out fees while you romp around the country enjoying yourself. I think not."

Kane glanced down at William Moore. His face was a mask. "I'd like you to go along for another couple of months," Kane said. "But if you don't choose to, I'll proceed on my own."

Now, the eyes of both Nages and Brooks turned on the silent Smith. They waited in what Kane suddenly realized was respectful silence. After a few moments, Smith spoke for the first time since he'd walked in the door.

"I think we'll go along with you," he said.

And that, evidently, was that. Seated behind his desk, William Moore smiled ever so faintly, but Joe Kane caught the smile. Leave it to Moore to know who really cracked the whip.

"Thank you, gentlemen," Kane said. "I'll do my best."

DONNA KING was living in a world of unreality. For two long weeks, she had been the mistress of Death Mountain Castle, and it was as if she had stepped across a threshold into another world. The unreality had begun even as the ship pulled out of the LaGuardia Space Station at New York.

The core of it was this man she had married—this Bruce Hakin. His treatment of her had been beyond reproach. He acted as though she were a creation of great value—a rare piece of china that would shatter at the slightest touch. He seemed able to anticipate her slighest wish in advance. He was by her side every instant of the day, and the Queen Chief of Mars could not have been more tenderly cared for.

At bedtime, he pressed his lips to her hand and withdrew, leaving her in privacy. On that first night, lying

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

alone, with the buzzing of the engines in her ears, came a stark thought: I am married to a man I don't know. I am, married to a man whom I have never kissed—who has demanded nothing of me—whose lips have not progressed beyond the knuckles of my right hand.

The ship flew on into the night. Where is it taking me? she asked herself. What lies at the end of the trip?

Then came sleep, and the last thought: I'm not married to a man. He's a ghost. Some kind of a phantom.

He's nothing but a pair of black eyes....

Jack...Jack...Goodnight, my darling....

How will I react, she wondered, with his hands on my body? Will they be cold and clammy like something in a dream? Will I be able to respond to him, or will I lie stiff and frightened like a slab of stone? His gentleness will slip away like a glove, and there will be violence.

Etched most deeply in her memory was her first glimpse of Death Mountain Castle. They left New City in a carriage pulled by a Martian *leng*, a six-legged animal similar to the Terra horse. The twin moons rode the night sky above them. As their carriage topped a rise in the twisting road, and they saw the old castle, it was as if an ancient print had suddenly come to life: the three ghostly turrets against the moons and somewhere across the flat the doleful mourning of the *nars*.

Donna shivered, and Bruce Hakin's gentle voice came instantly: "Are you cold, my dear? Let me draw up your wrap."

She drew away, slightly, in spite of herself, and was then in sudden fear at having done so. She smiled at him. "It's quite all right. I'm just tired."

"Of course. It's been a long, hard trip."

There was a wide stone porch in front of a door that did not seem to be a door. It was too big and ungainly. The carriage stopped in front of the porch. Bruce Hakin handed his bride down and the *leng* docilely carted the carriage off.

In the center of the eight-foot panel was a great iron ring. Bruce Hakin grasped this in both hands, lifted it and dropped it three times on the metal underneath. It clanged hollowly and Donna could hear the echoes inside, beyond the door.

They waited, and Donna saw a slight frown of impatience on the face of her husband. He raised his hand again, but now there was the groaning of metal on metal—the sound of chains—and the panel moved upward.

It came slowly, laboriously, up past Donna's knees. To the weary girl, it was like a live thing with a mind of its own—taunting her—delaying until the last possible moment the sight of what lay beyond.

THEN IT WAS there to see—a great dim cavern—the baronial hall of Death Mountain Castle. There was so much of it, she could only snatch quick impressions at first. Beyond the doorway, she could see the immense, brightly colored banners hanging on the gray-stone walls. Set in brackets around and about were innumerable flaring torches giving the scene an unstable background of continuously changing light and shadow. Directly ahead, far across the hall, rose a grand stairway wide enough to accommodate a team of horses. It reached a banner-hung wall, split, and curled away into the darkness in two directions.

Also, there were a man and a woman. *Arnos*. The woman wore deep

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

black from head to foot. Her thick black Martian hair was parted in the center and drawn tightly down on either side, to be caught in a knot at the nape of her neck. Her long muscular arms hung almost to her knees. Her small round eyes were devoid of expression as she peered at the newlyweds from under her sloping forehead.

The man was to the left of the door, laboring over a great spoked wheel around which an endless chain geared to the door. He straightened and turned with a hand against the small of his back. The glow of the torches cast an eerie look over the green skins of both.

A thought formed in Donna's mind. Frozen people! Unhuman. Unreal. What am I doing here? These Martians seem different from those I knew at home. I want to go home.

At that instant, the woman extended her long arms and smiled. The man smiled too, showing white sharp teeth, and Bruce Hakin said: "Clar-Myr-adelo and Clar-Feto-cheer, my dear, waiting to fulfill your every wish."

The green woman said gently, "Welcome to your new home, my child," and there was a frightening incongruity between her soft words and her fierce primitive appearance. The man said nothing, but there was something in his manner that warmed Donna. They were human, after all. For this small favor, Donna was grateful.

Bruce Hakin had swept her up into his arms and was striding forward. Immediately, Clar-Feto-cheer went to work again on the wheel. The great door moved downward and to Donna, somehow, it was like the jaws of a trap closing.

As Hakin lowered her to her feet, the movement coincided exactly with a sudden, overwhelming weakness within her. As her feet touched the floor, the strain of all this overtook her. She fainted and sank downward into darkness.

DONNA awoke from sleep, and it was her first impression that she had been dreaming. But if that were true, this also was a dream. She lay in a great canopied bed with coverings of silk, and a vivid tapestry on the opposite wall depicting a scene of pomp and heraldry from the Middle Ages.

The Martian woman, Clar-Myr-adelo, was standing beside the bed, a shaft of sunlight from a narrow high window cutting across her high cheekbones, softening the ugliness of her face and brightening the color of her green skin. She smiled, and Donna saw warmth and sincere interest.

"Did you sleep well, Milady?"

"I—I guess so—but this—" Donna looked about in bewilderment. "How did I get here?"

"This is Milady's bedchamber. She was brought here by Milord after she fainted last night. I put her to bed and she slept right through."

Clar-Myr-adelo turned toward a small table upon which stood a covered tray. Her awkward-looking body was, surprisingly enough, most agile. "I was just going to awaken Milady. I brought her breakfast."

Donna came sharply to a sitting posture. "Stop it! For heaven's sake, stop it! We aren't acting out a scene in a play. You sound as though you'd been coached!"

Clar-Myr-adelo picked up the tray and placed it on the bed in front of Donna. Then she stepped back. Her face, sloped forward on those massive shoulders, wore a look of doubt—of uncertainty. She was visibly trying to weigh her words. She said, finally, "We were coached, Milady. Last night, Milord—ah... Mr. Hakin—spent a long time telling us how we were to address you and conduct ourselves. I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hope I haven't made any mistakes." Her eyes were pleading.

Donna swiftly appraised the *arnos*. Was this woman a friend or an enemy? She had already conceded that she herself feared Bruce Hakin. She wondered if the servant was allied with her in that fear. Suddenly, it didn't matter.

"Do as you please when Mr. Hakin is around," she said, "but my name is Donna and that's what I'm to be called—not Milady."

The pose slipped from Myr-adelo. "Thank you," she said. "I hope you like the food." She wiped her huge hands on her apron and seemed ill at ease.

But Donna ignored the tray. "Have you and...your husband been with ...been here long?"

"Feto-cheer isn't my husband. He's my brother. We've been here about three years."

"I see. Who was here before that?"

"I don't know. I don't know much about it."

"Do you like it here?"

Myr-adelo considered the question. "We have no complaints," she said. She turned away as though asking to be dismissed. "I'll come back when you're ready and help Milady—and help you dress."

"You needn't bother about that. I can dress myself."

"Then I'll come back for the tray when you've finished your breakfast."

THE WOMAN departed, shoulders bent forward, hanging, feet shuffling. She seemed eager to be out of the room. She went down the broad stairway and rearward to the main floor kitchen. There, she dropped onto a chair beside a table on which Feto-cheer was preparing another tray of food.

"She's awake," Myr-adelo told her brother in their native Martian dialect. "I talked to her. And I don't like it at all. The way she asks questions gives me the idea she doesn't know anything about him—any more than we do."

The man had a fierce-appearing face. The sharply sloped narrow forehead ended in bushy eyebrows, underneath which the small eyes burned with a sullen anger at the world. His movements were deliberate, ponderous, giving hint of the slow brain behind the very small forehead.

"What kind of questions did she ask?"

"About us. How long we've been here and were there any before us?"

"Did you call her Milady all the time, like he said?"

"At first I did, but she wouldn't have it. She told me to call her by her name."

The man did not like that. He frowned and shook his ugly head. "You be careful. We don't know anything about her. You do as he says, or she might take it back to him. The pay is good here. We don't want any trouble."

"But why did he bring her out here? A lovely girl like she is. She won't be able to stand it in this place. The Earth people are different. He should not have made her come here."

"She came of her own accord."

"How do we know she did? True, he did not buy her from her father—but perhaps he used some kind of force. How do we know what's in his mind? Those screams—remember? And that room. If ever he takes her to that room, I'll—I'll do something. You mark my words, I'll do something!"

"You'll mind your own business, my sister. Besides, I never heard the screams. You did—or you said you did. I never believed you really heard them anyway."

"I heard them."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And this about a room. Were you ever in it? Do you know it's really there? There's no door, and whoever heard of a room without a door?"

"There's a room, I tell you," the woman insisted doggedly. "Where else do those men go?"

"They leave in the night when we're asleep. Besides, it isn't any of our business. He bought us to work here—remember? We cannot come and go as we please, the way these others do. When our term is over we can leave, not before. And he is a good man to us. Always remember—he pays us well."

"I'll not let him do anything to that girl," the woman said defiantly.

"You're a fool! Why should he do anything to her? She's his wife, isn't she? Why would a man do anything to his wife?"

"I don't know. I don't know anything except I'd like to be out of here and done with all this. It's not healthy! Sometimes I get the feeling I'm walking over graves; as if the dead stirred under my feet."

"Quit talking like that!" He laid a napkin over the tray and pushed it toward her. "Here. Take his breakfast up to him."

"Take it yourself," she said tartly. "I've got other things to do."

He grumbled deep in his throat and put a fresh scowl on his animal face, but he picked up the tray without protest and went out of the kitchen.

ALONE, Myr-adelo sat for some time staring at the wall ahead of her. Her thoughts went back three years to the first time she'd ever seen Bruce Hakin. Although the buying and selling of humans had been outlawed at least a decade, she and Feto-cheer were still working out the terms of their twenty-year bondage to Gorp-Eet-an, the leading merchantman in New City. They only had one more year to go and, having saved a tidy sum, had plans for opening a saloon on the outskirts of New City, where thirsty travelers coming into the city would stop to refresh themselves. But in their last year, the merchantman had needed money to expand his business and sold them to Paul Heath for five more years. Under the terms of the new law, they could have refused to go, but Hakin had offered to pay them well for their service, in addition to buying out their contract from Gorp.

The work wasn't hard. Lonely and monotonous at first, but not hard. But soon the monotony vanished—at least for Myr-adelo. There were things to wonder about, and as time went on, there was the growing fear in her heart; fear of she knew not what, but fear just the same. It was like when she'd been a baby living with her brother and their parents in a thatched hut in the desert, with the Martian red sand for a floor. When the Earth people had started to come the fear that insinuated itself into the hearts of the Martian *arnos*, and even the *rees* would never be wholly removed. For the rest of their days, the natives who remembered the first Earth pioneers would be afraid—and this had nothing to do with the fact that the people from space were friendly enough and did not knowingly do harm. This was a fear of the unknown, against which they were completely helpless.

Myr-adelo remembered the first time the fear began to grow in her again. It was the first time the men came to the castle. That night Hakin had said, "I will have breakfast downstairs tomorrow. And set three extra places."

The next morning three *arnos* were there to fill the place. She almost

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dropped her tray at sight of them. The people of her race kept much to themselves now. Except for a small minority who still ravaged the countryside and committed unspeakable crimes, the *arnos* now lived quietly and simply among themselves out on the desert. They never mixed with either the *rees*, or the Earth people, except in their capacity of working for them. So Myr-adelo was doubly surprised and shocked to see Mr. Hakin, neat as the surface of a newly polished mirror, sitting calmly there with the three. Any one of them looked so fierce, you'd expect they'd cut your throat for a single ten-cent piece.

Two days of that; then a new order: "Prepare three trays of food before you go to bed. Leave them on the table here in the kitchen."

Next morning, the trays and the dirty dishes were there. The food was gone.

TWO WEEKS of this. Two weeks of lying in her bed wondering what went on downstairs. She was tempted more than once to creep down and find out, but now the first touch of the fear had come. Had she gone down, it would have been impossible to conceal herself the while. But why should she conceal herself? Why not just go down?

She did this twice, but her timing was incorrect on both occasions. First, the food was still there, waiting. And the second time, she found the empty dishes.

On that second trip, she met Bruce Hakin on the stairs as she returned to her room. He stopped and stood silent, waiting for her to pass. His eyes followed her—seemed to lift her up the stairs—push her into her room.

He said not a word, but she had the conviction those eyes were reading her every thought—pulling them out through the back of her head and drawing them straight across space.

The fear came sharply into her that night and never departed. She never went down the stairs again.

At the end of two weeks, he said, "We'll need no more meals at present." That was all, and later Myr-adelo asked Feto-cheer, "Where did they go?"

"Stop asking questions. If he wanted us to know, he'd tell us. I don't want to know anything that's not my business, and it should be the same way with you."

Feto-cheer, determined to work out the remaining time of his contract, collect his money and go off, was not going to get involved in anything that would endanger his plans.

Those three had been the first but, as time went on, there were others. Sometimes they were *arnos*, sometimes they were *rees*, and once in a while they were Earthmen. But always they were one type—the vicious, dangerous-appearing type of man who looked as if he would as soon slit your throat as look at it. They came in twos, in threes, and sometimes only one. After they arrived, the procedure was always the same. After they disappeared, the length of time during which Myr-adelo left food on the kitchen table varied. Sometimes, it was only a week. In one case, it had been a whole month.

AND THEN had come that night—that one awful night she would always remember. One man had come to stay at the castle. He had disappeared as usual, and for three nights Myr-adelo had put the food on the kitchen table. On the third night, she found that the cream in the kitchen had soured. She went immediately down the long narrow back stairs into the basement. Down there, in one of the dungeons where it was cool, she

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kept the milk supply. She had just filled the pitcher and—sure of her way in the darkness—had turned away from the crock.

It was then she heard the scream. The pitcher dropped from her hand and smashed on the stone floor. She stood there frozen, and in her mouth was the taste of terror.

The scream came from nowhere and from everywhere. At first, it was a faint muffled sound. Then, it rose into a crescendo of agony; the inarticulate squall of a strong man under the hands of a torturer. It held to a high pitch for what seemed to the stricken woman an endless time, though it couldn't have been more than a few seconds.

Then, it trailed off into a sick, obscene yammer and was gone.

Myr-adelo fled up the stairs and there was no cream on the tray that night. She went straight to her bed and lay trembling the night through. She wanted to awaken Feto-cheer, but once in bed she was afraid to go again into the dim flarelit hall.

The next day all was as before. Nothing had changed. She took Bruce Hakin's tray to his room and his manner was exactly as it had always been. As she left his room, he said, "We'll no longer need the night tray, Myr-adelo."

Later, she sought to tell herself that she had seen a change in him that morning; that there was a vague preoccupation in his manner, as though his mind were busy with some new and pleasant secret. But this she rejected as a product of her own overwrought imagination.

Feto-cheer scoffed at her revelation. She was a woman, and women were always having such hallucinations. Grumbling, his long arms swinging, his small head bulging forward on massive shoulders, he went down into the dungeons with her. But they found nothing; only the dungeons themselves with their rusty chains and general air of sinister melancholy.

"It seemed to come from there—there at that end," she said, but there was only a stone wall where she pointed.

They approached the wall and Myr-adelo said, "There must be a room there—beyond."

Feto-cheer went over the wall carefully. It was solid. No breaks in the stone. Unblemished mildew covered it from top to bottom.

"Your nerves are getting the best of you," Feto-cheer told her. "Take a good dose of salts and go to bed."

"I heard a man screaming," Myr-adelo stated with conviction.

"And clean up that smashed pitcher. If he comes down and sees it, he might be mad."

Myr-adelo shook her head. "No. He wouldn't be mad. His madness is not that kind. It's deep down inside him. It wouldn't come out over a little thing like a broken pot."

And that was how things were. Other men came, and there was more food on the kitchen table, but Myr-adelo never heard the screams again.

When Bruce Hakin entered his wife's bedchamber that first morning, he found her still occupied with breakfast. At least, the breakfast was still before her. She had eaten little.

"I hope you are feeling better this morning," he said.

"I'm all right now. It was silly of me to faint last night."

"It was my fault. I should have notice the symptons. If you feel able, I'd like to take you on an inspection tour this morning—show you your new home."

"I'll get dressed at once."

He stood regarding her thoughtfully. "I wonder if I might select your

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dress? If you do not mind, that is?"

"Why—why certainly. If you wish."

He turned and walked toward a huge cabinet against the far wall, and as her eyes followed him, Donna thought: He's acting too. Just like the woman when she brought my breakfast. I don't understand. His clothes and his manners aren't of today at all. They're something right out of the middle ages.

BUT THERE was a difference that Donna now saw and recognized. The woman had been acting—unwillingly and clumsily. To Bruce Hakin, however, all this was beyond masquerade. He fitted so perfectly, so naturally into the surroundings, he was as much a part of them as the bright banners and the flickering torches.

Then it struck her forcibly: this man I married is living in another age. The minute he stepped through that door last night, he became a feudal baron. He's as much a part of this unreality as the banners and the narrow windows and the cold stone floors.

But her mind was jerked sharply from this train of thought as he drew back the doors of the cabinet. He turned again and smiled. "I took a liberty, my dear. While I was in New York, I did some shopping for you."

Donna gasped. The cabinet was filled with dresses—garments looking as though they'd come from a theatrical costuming establishment. Great, full skirts, close-bodiced affairs of rich satin, glowing silk—of colors both subdued and flaming. There were enough of these creations to clothe every woman in a medieval pageant.

Entirely disarmed, Donna blurted the first thought that came to her mind: "But—but I don't understand. When did you do all this? How did you know my size? How—"

Bruce Hakin frowned just slightly—with just a faint shade of annoyance—as though a prop wall had tilted during the performance of a play to reveal the stage props behind.

"That was very simple. I believe I told you I made investigations in New York. Your dressmaker wasn't hard to find."

With the new revelation of this man's capacities, Donna felt suddenly chilly, as though the room had turned cold. He had moved steadily and surely from the beginning to the end of this affair! While she herself had had no knowledge of his existence, he had been planning her future; fitting her carefully into this dream world of his, and with never a moment's doubt that she would arrive on the stage on cue.

The implications were staggering. Then I'm just a prop too, she thought. I'm something that fits the dresses just as the dresses fit me. All this is some sort of a play. But still, there must be an end to such things. Plays always have an ending. The curtain always comes down at the end of the last act—the last scene. Or was this an endless play?

"I wonder if you would wear this purple morning dress? It would please me very much."

"Of course."

"Thank you. I'll send Myr-adelo up. Then, when you're quite ready, I'll show you through your new home."

The door closed behind him and Donna sat in the center of the great bed hugging her knees.

Five minutes later, Myr-adelo entered the room. She was wearing a coat and bonnet. Donna threw back the covers and got swiftly out of bed. Her eyes were wide, fearful. "You're not—you're not leaving? You're not going away?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Mr. Hakin caught me just as I was starting to town. I go in twice a week for supplies. Anyway, we can't leave. Don't you know we are in bondage to Mr. Hakin—my brother and I—for another two years?" Myr-adelo came forward toward the bed. "Why, child! You're trembling. Is something wrong?"

Donna smiled weakly. "I guess I'm just not used to—this place yet. I'll be all right."

"Mr. Hakin insisted I help you dress."

Donna picked up the purple morning gown. "I'm afraid you'll have to. Do you think you can get me into this thing?"

Myr-adelo removed her bonnet and coat, took the gown and held it at arm's length. "We'll manage," she said.

"It isn't my idea," Donna said, and there was an unnaturally high pitch to her voice. "I didn't bring it with me." She waved an arm toward the open cabinet. "They were all here, waiting for me, this morning."

Clar-Myr-adelo glanced up in surprise. "Then it was Mr. Hakin?"

Donna nodded.

"I hung them up myself," the green woman said. "Last night when you were asleep. A wagon brought your trunk from town about an hour after you got here." She laid the gown on the bed. "I'll draw your bath," she said. "That's the one modern touch we have here. Water is piped into several rooms from a tank filled by the windmill. We have a stove upstairs to heat the water."

She went through a doorway to the left and Donna heard water running.

IT WAS HALF an hour later, when she was brushing down the folds of Donna's skirt, that Myr-adelo risked asking the question she had in mind. "Did you know Mr. Hakin a long time before you married him?"

Donna hesitated, then replied, "No—no, I didn't. A very short time."

There was silence as Clar-Myr-adelo straightened and stepped back to survey her handiwork.

"Why do you ask?" Donna questioned.

Myr-adelo did not reply immediately. She seemed to be framing her answer carefully. She was remembering Feto-cheer's words: "He is a good man to us. Always remember—he pays us well." Maybe the girl would think she was snooping and carry it back to Bruce Hakin. Then, she and Feto-cheer would be in real trouble—he could have them whipped by the high tribunal.

But her instincts told her that Donna was eager for a friend. "Oh, I don't know," she said. "Even after three years here, I still know so little about him...." It was a frank invitation to confidence. Now, it was up to the girl to respond.

And Donna did. "I married Mr. Hakin under peculiar circumstances. It would take too long to tell you, but I know nothing about him at all. I don't even know what business he's in."

Myr-adelo's attitude changed. The die was cast now. The earth girl had made an overture—an invitation to confidence. The poor child must feel in need of a friend now. She, Myr-adelo, was not going to reject the girl's confidence. "I don't know either. I've been here three years, and there's nothing I can tell you about that. I can tell you this, though. Be very careful, Miss Donna. You're his wife and maybe he loves you and thinks of you as a wife, but—"

"I don't understand."

"We haven't much time now," Myr-adelo said. "Later, we'll find a chance

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to talk. In the meantime—"

"There's something I've been wondering about. Last night after I fainted..." Donna's smooth skin flared to high color, and Myr-adelo asked, "What about last night?"

"Did you come upstairs with me? Did you undress me and put me to bed?"

Myr-adelo shook her head. "I came as far as the door. Then he shut it in my face. He carried you inside."

Donna turned and walked toward the window, her thoughts chaotic: Then I'm closer—much closer to being his wife than I thought. She felt her body grow hot under the gown. And, strangely enough, it was Bruce Hakin's eyes of which Donna was thinking, not his hands. What his hands had done seemed unimportant. All she could think of was those black piercing eyes caressing and devouring her as she had lain senseless on the bed.

RESOLUTELY, Donna turned her mind from this thought and deliberately forced it into self-analysis. Was this unnatural abhorrence of Bruce Hakin some sort of defense mechanism she had unconsciously built up? She knew that basically she was a normal healthy girl; that, aside from the restraints imposed by decency and the ordinary conventions of society, there was nothing of the prude in her.

In seeking a reason for this revulsion against her husband, she went deep into causes and effects. Her destiny, so far as nature was concerned, was to be mated with a man. This she knew, and also that nature, in itself, is not squeamish where the gaining of its ends is concerned. In the eyes of natural law, a man is a man and a woman is a woman. Nature cares nothing for wedding rings. The wedding rings is the symbol of a law imposed by society, not by itself.

In her case, she had complied with both laws. She had a wedding ring, and she had a warm eager body waiting to bloom and become articulate in the manner prescribed by nature.

Therefore, why the revulsion for Bruce Hakin—the definite physical revulsion she knew it to be? Mental reservation she could understand—even outraged social instinct. But it was her body revolting against Bruce Hakin—cringing and dreading physical contract. Something told her that these basics—these deep-rooted subconscious stirrings—were far wiser than any thoughts in her conscious mind. Therefore, only one conclusion was to be drawn: this man to whom I'm married is evil. There is something within him disowned even by nature itself. Then the tragic question: where does that leave me?

There was a knock on the door. The door opened. A strangely soothing voice, a voice like an opiate: "I have never seen you more beautiful, my dear."

He was impeccably clad in tight-fitting, fawn-colored britches. He wore a white vest and a long-tailed coat. He was inordinately handsome. He came forward, extending an arm. "If you are quite ready."

"I'm ready." She laid her hand on his arm and they moved toward the door.

Maybe the devil is handsome, too, Donna thought.

Jack Barron left New York with a suitcase, a ticket to the Moon, and a five-hundred-dollar bill. He arrived on the Moon base with a suitcase, considerably less than his five-hundred dollars, and a sense of grim exhilaration. This last had been growing upon him, and when he walked through the Moon space station, it was in full bloom.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It was the result of having stepped out of a routine. His life up to this—his twenty-third year—had been one of sharply defined paths. His had been a comparatively sheltered youth; even more so than usual because of an illness that had cost him three years of early schooling. Then, a job as clerk in a Wall Sreet brokerage house which was nothing more than a financial stepping stone toward the career he had chosen. The dull slogging routine of study after working hours. His ambition to be a top accountant superseding all else.

THE ONLY wonderful thing that had ever happened to him had been Donna King. But she was also in the form of an ambition, because she was a delight to be experienced only when he could afford it. He had lost both his parents tragically close together when he was nineteen, so his realationship with Donna was the only intense human contact to which he could cling. But he had not learned how deep his love really was until he'd read her note that terrible morning. Within a few hours, his ambitions other than her had vanished like new snow. And with them had gone the discipline and the restrictions they imposed. For the first time in his life, he felt the plesant anticipation which is the first reaction of an unplanned future. This, coupled with thoughts of his vague objective, gave him the feeling of being a man for the first time in his life. And he found his mind planning calmly for tomorrow with much greater zest than he had previously planned for a time years in the future.

Over a cup of coffee, he considered the fact that he was still far from Mars, and he didn't have enough money to get there. So, he was mentally conditioned when a tight-faced stranger spoke to him half an hour later. The stranger spoke softly from a corner of his mouth: "There's a place down the block, buddy. The games are easy, in case you want to kill a few hours."

Jack indicated silently that he was not averse to this, and the stranger muttered an address. "Tell 'em Noisy sent you."

"Noisy sent me," Jack told a man who looked out at him through a bung-hole in a door. The door opened and Jack went into a long, low-ceilinged room filled mainly with smoke of Earth cigars and cigarettes, of Martian taps, the perfumed reed which was so popular on that planet, and of Venusian welts. The welts gave off an odor like Chinese incense, and it was this odor that permeated Jack's consciousness long before he was aware of what the room contained. There were green-topped tables, he also discovered, spinning wheels, and a conglomeration of inhabitants from all over the universe—Earthmen, Martians, Venusians.

He pushed into one of these circles and found a man hurling a pair of dice the length of a table, where they tripped over a taut string and came to rest reading three-five.

The stickman pushed the dice back. "Eight's the point," the stickman droned. The six-legged Venusian at the other end of the table threw the dice again. The green stickman said, "Eight it is," and a sigh went up around the table.

The stickman was unimpressed. He pushed the dice back. "He does or he don't. Put down your money, men."

There was a square on the table reading "natural". Jack laid a ten-dollar bill on this spot and watched the dice gallop along the table.

"Six-ace," the green man intoned in a bored voice. "The man's hotter than a tin stove. Make it while it's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here, gents. Make it while it's here."

And the stickman, it seemed, was entirely correct. The man threw another natural and Jack bit his lip at sight of the greenbacks that had come to visit his lone ten-dollar bill. He gripped the table edge—cut his fingernails into the wood to keep from reaching.

There were three more passes. Then Jack unhooked his hands and extended an arm. But his hand never reached the money. At that instant, a whistle sounded shrilly through a room. A split second of utter stillness, with everyone standing like statues.

BEDLAM followed. Salted around the room were a number of men who stopped being gamblers and began acting like policemen. Jack was shoved backward, bodily, by a sudden surge of panicky men. He yelled, "Hey! My money! That's my money there!" But his voice was lost in the general uproar. There was a great deal of aimless milling, and Jack's next clear realization came when he was seated in a wagon on a hard bench, bouncing along the street.

The police station was a bare-walled, evil-smelling place. The cell into which Jack was thrown, along with six other gamblers from all three planets, was foul beyond conception. Safely behind its bars, Jack sat wearily down on another hard bench and stared at the floor. There must have been over a thousand dollars in that pile, he thought. A thousand dollars, only to have them yanked away when they were almost at his fingertips. Around him, the others were voicing their complaints, cursing heartily. Jack sat there and cursed along with them.

Twelve hours later, he was again tasting the new freedom, but it now had a rather bitter flavor. His precious money had gone into the city coffers, leaving him nothing.

He went directly from the police station to the door with the small hole in its panel. He knocked. There were no sounds from within. He doubled his fist and pounded. He was beginning to get mad.

The street was draped in the darkness of late evening and a broad-shouldered Earthman suddenly loomed shadowlike beside him.

"What's the trouble, buddy?"

"This place owes me money."

"It was raided today."

"I don't give a damn. I want my money."

The man regarded Jack closely. "There's a back entrance," he said. "I'll show you."

Jack followed the man up the walk and into an alley. Somewhere back in there, the man turned and belted Jack over the head with a small lead-filled sap he drew from his sleeve. Jack laid himself down on the pavement and knew no more.

There was a period, later, of brief, hazy consciousness when someone seemed to be giving him a drink. Then, oblivion for a long time.

He came to with the rhythm of the spaceship. He opened his eyes, sat up and held his spinning head. There was an evil taste in his mouth. His vision cleared and he could see other men around him in the dimness. They were sitting about in groups and heard a casual voice: "The kid's coming out of it."

He turned and looked into a face that seemed as primitive as that in the first scale of mankind. "Where am I?" Jack asked weakly. "Back in jail?"

There was laughter around him. The animal face said, "Hell no, kid. You ain't in jail. You're on the way to Mars. You signed up with the spacelines at a buck a day."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Like hell I did."

The man was grinning. "Sure now, and that's right. The gospel truth. You were drunk and couldn't put your name down, but the muscle did it for you. He put Tom Jones on the book and now you're set to get rich swinging a pick on the road bed."

Jack was learning fast. "Like hell I did. I—" He stopped and sat silent for a moment. "Mars?' Would that be anywhere around New City?"

"Something like that, kid. Where else? Ain't nothing else on that planet built up as yet."

Jack felt a lot better. He lay back on the floor of the groaning ship and closed his eyes. "Maybe I did sign up at that," he said. "Maybe I did."

Someone laughed. A jeering voice. "You was signed up with a blackjack, kid. The space lines—this line anyway—pays ten bucks a head for whatever they get loaded on at the Moon depot. They don't ask no questions either."

Jack was amazed. He opened his eyes, but he stayed where he was because of his pounding head. "Why, that's—that's illegal."

There was a great guffaw. "It sure is! Tail it back to the Moon, kid! Tell the cops about it! They'll sure back you up."

Jack closed his eyes and began assembling his thoughts. This was not easy, because his thought went illusively around in a whirlpool and refused to assemble. But gradually he took stock of himself. And it was a new Jack Barron he was looking at; at least, a different one.

LYING ON THE foor of a renegade space ship, partially—filled with doped whiskey, he felt more alive than he'd ever felt before. It was strange. The exhilaration was still there, as if a thick coating had been stripped from his brain. His thoughts were new thoughts, utterly alien from those of Jack Barron the aspiring accountant.

Donna King flared bright and desirable into his mind, and he realized he had never before thought of her in this way. Certain inhibitions were now gone from his mind. His thoughts were open and unashamed. He wanted Donna and he recognized the want as springing from the boiling well of desire. He wanted her lips, her arms, her body.

And lying there in the ship, he recognized the change in himself. A few short days before, he would have shunted away the thoughts he now had as being indecent.

I've just started to live, he thought. I've just started to live.

A week later, he was sitting in a smaller and more thinly populated jail than that he'd inhabited on the Moon. The jail in New City, Mars. But even in this helpless state, he felt more able to cope with the problems of life than he ever had before.

The marshal of New City, Mars, sat with his feet on the scarred desk in his office and looked across at a balding, tired-looking little man one would never take for a detective.

"He got back from New York about two weeks ago," the marshal said. "Brought a girl with him."

"Her name was King," Joe Kane said. "I wired for information on that. Daughter of a Wall Street broker. She married Hakin. Only God knows why."

The marshal, lantern-jawed man with drooping mustaches, said, "I got the same information just this morning. I got my pipe lines, too, Kane." He grinned.

Kane showed quick interest. "New York didn't send out a reader, did they?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Nope. I got the word from a bum that staggered into town. Funny thing, that. The tramp I'm talking about loped in this morning looking like he hadn't had anything in his belly for days. Went into a saloon and asked where the hell there was a castle around here. Said he had some business with the guy that owned it.

"He wasn't packing a gun, but he looked tough enough to cut your throat for a nickel, pants out at the knees and the sole of one shoe gone. But cocky as Billy-be-damned, he was, and looked like he might be dangerous, so they called me over."

"What did he know about the girl?"

"According to him, he knew plenty. Had a yarn about how she was slated to marry him back in New York and there'd been some funny business."

"With Hakin involved, it's possible."

"As a matter of fact, maybe he was telling the truth about Hakin's wife being slated to marry him. But I'm pretty sure everything was on the level."

"How so?"

"This kid—he says his name is Jack Barron—had a note from Hakin's wife. It was addressed to Barron, and she told him she was going to marry Hakin. Looks to me like the kid was jilted and he's hot under the collar about it."

"Where is he now?"

THE MARSHAL indicated with his thumb. "Back there in a cell. Figured I'd cool him off a couple of days and then boot him out of town. Anyhow, the cell hasn't been used for a week. Had a *rees* in there before that; he'd gotten in dutch with his wife and was afraid to go home."

Joe Kane sat staring at the toe of his boot. He seemed lost in thought. The marshal regarded him with an almost paternal attitude. "You're all wrong about Bruce Hakin, Joe."

Joe Kane looked up at the marshal quickly. "Am I?"

"Look, you went through his place yourself. You didn't find anything."

"I didn't pull up the stones in the basement and use a shovel."

The marshal made a motion of impatience. "Be sensible, man! You claim there's some ten or twenty dead men buried somewhere under Hakin's castle—"

"I didn't claim that at all. I just said it's the only thing that logically follows their disappearance."

"It's the same as saying it, but it don't hold water. It couldn't possibly happen."

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you why not. Let's grant that some bandit did that once—went to Hakin's place trying to hide from the law. We'll grant Hakin killed him, got rid of the body. But that's just one man, you're trying to account for over a dozen. If they went there over a period of years, as you claim, they went of their own accord, and you know yourself a whole string of desperate men didn't walk into his booby trap just one after another."

Joe Kane was an unusual type. He was not openly stubborn, and yet no man was more stubborn than he. Rather, his determination was of the patient, inoffensive variety. To hit at his convictions was like punching a pillow; nothing solid with which to make contact. But, in the long run, the punches won nothing; they made no dent in Joe Kane.

"You're perfectly right," he said. "Maybe I'm all wrong in what I've figured out, but after all, I haven't got much to go on—mostly rumor—very little fact."

"Then why don't you forget it?"

"Because there's something wrong out there. The facts I have got point

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to it. I've got to find out the truth about Bruce Hakin."

The marshal showed a faint disgust. "I can tell you what's wrong with him. He's a mild, harmless kind of a madman. In fact, you can't even call him mad. He goes around living in his dreams. It's that damn castle that's done it to him. He's got the idea he's living in the time they really used castles like that. He thinks he's a middle-ages lord of some kind, and we're all a lot of serfs. You can see it in him. He rides into town giving us the benevolent eye—the grand-lord-of-the-manor business—and I've got to admit he does a good job of it. He sure looks the part."

Joe Kane turned an analytical eye on the marshal. "As a matter of fact, don't you and the rest of the leading citizens like to have him around because you figure he's good for the town?"

"Well..."

"And this stuff about his being a mild, harmless madman. You know better than that. There's no such thing as a harmless softhead. They're always potentially dangerous, and this Hakin— I've got a hunch about him."

"You're too full of theory, Joe," the marshal said comfortably. "What's your hunch?"

"I think he's the kind that goes along on an even keel for years—keeps it bottled up inside him like lava in a volcano. Then, somebody touches it off—pulls the one trigger that lights the powder. And you have a maniac on your hands."

"I doubt it."

"But that's neither here nor there. The point is, I'm about ready to make my play, and I'll need you to back me up."

"Your play? What's your play?"

"Well, I'm going to pay Mr. Hakin a visit. Maybe there won't be any trouble. But if I don't come out of the castle within forty-eight hours, I want you to go in there and get me."

The marshal frowned. "I can't see what you're aiming to accomplish, Joe, but I suppose there isn't any law against you walking up and knocking on his door. You'll come out any time you're ready, of course. But if you didn't—"

He was interrupted by a sudden racket coming from the rear of the building. "That'll be my boy back there in the cell," the marshal said. "Had to cuff him around a little when I was bringing him in. He must be perking up some now."

Kane got up from his chair. "Sit still," he said to the marshal. "I'll go back and quiet him down. I think I'd like to have a little talk with him. I want to know what he's sore about."

The marshal shrugged. He pointed to a nail on the wall. "Help yourself. There's the key."

Kane took the key from the wall. He went to a door at the rear of the office, opened it, and went down a short hall at the end of which was a steel-barred cell. He stood looking through the bars adjusting his eyes to the dimness. "You're a hell of a looking specimen," he said gently.

THE YOUNG man he was speaking to had a thickly stubbled chin and ragged clothing, and he was stretched out on the cell cot. The tin cup he'd been scraping across the bars lay on the floor. The youth's hands were now locked behind his head, and he was not at all abashed by the low state into which he'd fallen. He was bright-eyed and entirely at ease. "That suit you've got on could stand some pressing," he retorted.

"What's your name?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Jack Barron."

"Understand you come looking for a fellow."

"This is a stinking town."

"Understand you come looking for a fellow named Bruce Hakin."

"That's what I mean about the town. I come along, minding my own business, ask a few questions about how to locate a man, and they throw me into the pokey for opening my mouth."

"What have you got against Hakin?"

"I'll tell you—you and anybody else who wants to know. Hakin is a rotten, low-down snake. He probably came from the Venusian scum-pile. He's—"

"What's your gripe, fellow?"

"My girl. He took my girl. She and I were going to be married. Then I got a letter from her in New York. She said she was going to marry Hakin and come out to Mars with him."

"Then what did you do?"

"Got drunk."

"Not very original. Anybody can do that."

"But I sobered up again. That's what a lot of them can't do. When I was drunk, I asked myself: who is Bruce Hakin? After I sobered up, I began to use my head and realized I knew exactly who he was."

"And who exactly was he?"

"The guy who smashed Donna's father, Charles King, on Wall Street."

"Smashed him?"

"Well, not exactly. This is the way it was. You see, I worked for Charles King. I was his clerk and bookkeeper. He has a brokerage house on Wall Street. That's where I met his daughter, Donna. A little while ago things began happening to King's firm—peculiar things like loans being called on an hour's notice for no reason at all. And other things you wouldn't understand unless you know finance. In a comparatively short time, old Charlie was against the fence. For a while, none of it made sense to me."

"But later on it did make sense?"

"You're damn right it did. Two days before the axe was slated to fall on Charles King's neck, Donna married a man she'd never seen before. I'm certain of that because I know everyone she knows. She married this man and —well, you haven't heard of any failure on Wall Street, have you?"

"We're a long way from New York, kid. Maybe the news wouldn't get this far."

"You'd hear about it if Charles King failed. He was a sensitive old duck. Honor, integrity, and all that. He'd have killed himself."

"Then it's your idea that Bruce Hakin pushed the girl's father into a tight spot and held it over her head?"

"It's not just an idea. It's a fact, mister."

"But how could one man do that? Ruin a firm."

"If he was smart enough and had enough money."

Joe Kane unlocked the cell door and went inside as Jack Barron sat up and put his feet on the floor. Joe dropped down by his side, casually twirling the key ring on his finger.

"Oh, it was all very legal, of course," Barron went on. "A lot more legal than the pasting I'm going to give that bastard when I find him."

"You'll never get out of here with that kind of talk, son," Kane said mildly. "Sit down and cool off. You're going at this thing the wrong way. All you'll get will be trouble."

"That's nothing new. Trouble and I are buddies—bosom pals. I'd feel lost without trouble slogging along at my heels. I'm going to see Donna and find out what goes on out here. I'm telling you."

"But not the way you're going at it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Quiet down and let me tell you some things about Bruce Hakin, some things you haven't even dreamed of."

Barron's eyes widened. "You mean you're after him too?... By the way, I didn't get your name."

"I didn't give it to you. It's Joe Kane. I'm a detective from the Moon base, and if you want to string along with me, you can probably see your girl tonight. Play it your way, and the marshal will keep you in here until Bruce Hakin comes to town and signs a complaint. He'll do that too when he finds out who you are. Then, you'll roost here for a while."

"You mean you can get me out?"

"I think so. There's no charge against you yet. But first, let me tell you about Hakin. Then, you can decide for yourself whether or not your girl is in danger."

EVEN AFTER two weeks at Death Mountain Castle, Donna's feeling of unreality increased with the hours and the days. She felt herself not one degree closer to her husband than when she'd first set eyes upon him in New York.

But now there was much more to wonder about—much more to dread. There were the things Myr-adelo had told her, haltingly, almost warily at first, her Martian accent becoming stronger with her fear. About the man Bruce Hakin, about the mysterious visitors who vanished into nowhere, the screams in the night and an uncharted room somewhere in the castle from which the screams must have come.

Bruce Hakin had shown Donna no such place as this. The dungeons in the basement and the instruments of torture were grim enough, but they had obviously never been used. They were part of the authenticity, the atmosphere of the castle. Old Jimmy Hakin had demanded and gotten an exact replica of his dream castle.

Donna had refused to believe Myr-adelo's stories, the more bizarre of them. Myr-adelo was sincere and a good friend, for which Donna was grateful, but she was certainly possessed of an imagination.

Donna was far more concerned with the personal relationship between herself and Bruce Hakin. This she could not fathom. What manner of man was he? Had he actually married her to have a mistress for this story-book castle of his? She had taken it for granted that her body constituted a part of this bargain she'd made. She had tried to imagine what his love-making would be like. Would he be as cold and formal as he always was? Or was the coldness—and the formality—merely a superficiality, and underneath was he ablaze? But not once had he made a passionate gesture toward her. Aside from that first night, when he'd put her to bed, she had not been unclothed in his presence. Did he want only a puppet to walk around in fabulous gowns and preside at a dinner table set with flickering candles?

Donna's instincts told her this could not be true. The time would come when she must be his wife completely. And not until then—not until this strange man's passion flamed up about her—would the sense of unreality vanish.

She lay now on her great canopied bed wondering. Why, she asked herself, do I dread the violence that's sure to come because it will be Bruce Hakin's violence? Why do I dread it from him when I would be so eager for it from Jack Barron?

And, as though by some mystic timing, the door opened at that moment, and Myr-adelo hurried into the room. She was breathing heavily from

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

running up the stairs. "I've got news for you," she said. "There's a young man in New City asking about you and Mr. Hakin. He says his name is Jack Barron and he's from New York!"

Donna came sharply erect. "Jack? Here in Mars?"

Myr-adelo sat down on the bed and began pouring out the words. "I was in town buying groceries and I saw the town marshal pushing this young man up the street. He had him by the collar and the seat of his pants. He looked like a bum. His pants were out at the knees and one shoe was almost off. He didn't like being carted off to jail, but there was nothing he could do about it. After the marshal took him into jail, I asked around and found out what I just told you. This Jack Barron told somebody in the saloon he was coming out here and kick Mr. Hakin clear over the mountains. That's why they put him in jail."

Donna's first reaction was one of warmth. Jack! Her stiff, prim, conventional accountant! He refused to be put off with a short note saying she was going out of his life. Her Jack!

BUT THEN came the chill. Bruce Hakin was powerful in New City. He had influence. He must not get a chance to use it against Jack. Something had to be done.

"You'll have to drive me in to town tonight," Donna said. "After I've gone to bed, I'll slip out somehow. Have the carriage ready. I've got to talk to him before my husband hears that he's in town. I've got to talk to him."

Joe Kane and a newly outfitted Jack Barron rode through the twilight toward Death Mountain Castle. They traveled at a leisurely gait, Jack stiff and uncomfortable in the saddle.

"It'll be dark when we get there," Kane said. "We'll hit it just about right. Sure you want to go through with this?"

"Quit asking me that," Jack Barron said. "Of course I want to go through with it."

"It's dangerous—what we're doing, boy. Remember that."

Jack grinned. "Why? I thought you looked like a bank robber the first minute I saw you."

"We aren't bank robbers. We looted a Trans-Space baggage car safe and they'll back us up on it—put out an alarm—but that might not help much."

Jack's grin broke into a laugh as he looked at the black satchel tied to Kane's saddle. "You worry too much. Once we get inside, we'll find out what we want to know."

"It may not be as easy as that, because we're going in blind. We don't know of any of Hakin's outside contacts. Maybe the right man has to send us, or maybe Hakin will remember my face from somewhere, although I don't think he knows me. We'll be walking on dangerous ground if I've got Hakin figured right."

"We've got our guns," Jack said, patting the holster on his hip. "I can't see any reason why he'd ask us to give them up."

"The main trouble is, we don't know why we're going there. These hi-jackers don't wander into his castle without a reason. They know why they're there; we don't."

"We heard about him. Some crook told another crook and the second crook told us, but we don't exactly remember his name."

"I know a few names I'll use, but that's about the way we'll have to handle it. But let me do the talking. And if there's any gun play, you follow my lead. Take all your cues from me."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There were a few minutes of silence, after which Joe Kane said, "There it is—up ahead at the base of the mountain. Those three spires. That's where we'll find your girl Donna."

Jack Barron stared for a time without speaking, then said, "My gosh! It looks like something out of ancient history. I knew what to expect, but when you actually see it, the place gives you the creeps."

"They say old Jimmy Hakin was crazy. I guess he had to be to build a house like that. It's getting dark. Let's make a little time."

Kane heeled his mount into a gallop and Jack Barron found himself too busy for further conversation. Nor did he have much time to view the castle until they reined up in front of the porch. Joe Kane slapped the leather bag. "This is good counterfeit and I don't think he'll spot it. Let's hope I'm right."

He pushed his mount up on the stone porch to the door. Then, reaching out, he banged the door with the barrel of his gun. As the sounds echoed faintly inside the building, he turned and smiled mirthlessly at Jack Barron. "This is it, son. On your toes."

IT SEEMED hours to Jack Barron before the door was finally lifted. He sat tense, ready for anything, as the green-faced *arnos* shuffled forward. The man seemed harmless enough.

"I'll take your mounts, gentlemen; if you'll just go inside, Mr. Hakin will be right down."

They went inside, into the dim, flare-lit foyer, and stood waiting. "Good Lord, what a place," Jack breathed. "Donna locked up in a tomb like this?"

Kane scowled. "Keep your mouth shut! Don't even whisper about Donna! You're Pug Nixson from Baltimore, and if you forget it for a second, you can wreck us completely."

Jack grinned, bright-eyed as a terrier pup. "Sure, Matson, I gotcha. You can depend on me." But the words were only on his tongue, not in his mind. I've got to talk to Donna, he told himself. I've got to talk to Donna.

There was a soft magnetic voice coming from somewhere: "Good evening, gentlemen. Welcome to the castle. It was nice of you to come." Then, Bruce Hakin appeared from the shadows on the left.

A sudden fear jumped into Kane's mind: was he there all the time? Was he standing there watching us? If he heard what I said, we're through before we start.

It was as if Bruce Hakin read his thoughts. "I didn't mean to startle you. I came down a side stairway directly from the second floor."

"We're looking for a man named Hakin," Joe Kane growled. "We were told we'd find him here."

"Of course. I'm Bruce Hakin."

"I'm Tom Matson. Maybe you heard of me and maybe you didn't. This is Pug Nixson. There was a guy I met in Nashville—"

"I'm sure there was. But we can talk about that later. You must be very tired." Bruce Hakin glanced down at the bag Kane carried. Hakin's eyes were inscrutible. "Let me show you to a room. Our discussions can wait."

Kane was acting upon a mixture of experience and instinct, jumping from second to second like a man hopping bogs through a swamp. He deepened his scowl and wiped a hand across his mouth. "Now, wait a minute, mister. Not so fast! We ain't here as house guests exactly, and something's got to be settled." He allowed his hand to drop down and lie on his gun butt.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Let me tell you, so if you don't want any of it, we can be out of here and on our way."

"Very well. What did you wish to tell me?"

"In plain words: we stuck up a Trans-Space spaceship. We did all right too. Almost a cool million, and it's right here in this bag."

"Were you identified?"

Here, Kane was forced to make a guess. Which answer would best suit his purpose? He chose the affirmative. "This damn fool's mask dropped off," he said, pointing to Jack.

Jack was grim-lipped as he took the accusation. "It wasn't my fault. And you're as bad off as I am. That pilot saw you."

Bruce Hakin's face did not change. "Were there any deaths?"

"I killed one of the guards," Jack replied laconically.

"Why did you come here? Why didn't you go back to Earth? Or what about the Moon?"

"There was a cop down there sounding off—asking questions about you. Joe Kane was his name, I think, and a friend of mine got the dope indirectly—that if a man was ever hot, this was the place to come. Well, mister—we're hot."

There was a gap of silence like a deep chasm between two cliffs. Then Hakin said, "And tired too, no doubt. Let me show you to your room. Dinner will be served in about an hour."

After Bruce Hakin left Jack and Joe Kane in a high-ceilinged room in the south wing, he returned to the main hall on the second floor and knocked upon Donna's door. He went in and found her seated at her dressing table combing her hair.

He stood behind her looking down. She glanced up and saw something in those great dark eyes. She felt his hands as they stroked gently through the strands of her hair.

"You are very beautiful, my dear."

"Thank you."

"Have you been happy here? Has it been too lonely?'

"Y-yes, I've been happy . . ."

"You wouldn't care to leave? To perhaps return to Earth? After all, that is your home. I was born on Mars, you know, in this very house, so to me there is no other place."

"I'm your wife, Bruce," she said. "I'll go where you go— I'll stay where you stay."

FOR THE first time since she'd known him, his perfect restraint seemed to grow thin. He leaned forward as his body pressed against her back.

And to Donna's sharpened senses it was as though she could feel the volcano boiling inside him, just beyond the thin wall of flesh and muscle. "Your words make me very happy," he told her softly.

Then, he was again erect, poised, entirely self-contained. "I would like you to have dinner in your room tonight," he said. "Would it be asking too much?"

"Here? With you?"

"No, my dear, I'm afraid not. Two business acquaintances arrived this evening. I will have to dine with them. However, they are hardly up to your social standard—even though they do happen to be Earthmen—and I'm afraid you'd be bored with them."

"It's quite all right, Bruce, really."

"Thank you, my dear. I'll look in on you later."

Bruce Hakin left and Donna sat staring into her mirror. This, then, was what Mry-adelo had told her about. Strange men appearing from nowhere, to proceed with some mysterious business in which Bruce Hakin was involved. White men, green men,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Earthmen, Martian *arnos*, Martian *rees*, men who came out of the night carrying satchels, rough bearded men who vanished as abruptly as they appeared.

What did it mean? Then, another thought superseded. Would this interfere with her trip to New City? She mustn't let it interfere. She had to see Jack—to send him away from Mars before Bruce Hakin learned of his presence here.

An hour later, Clar-Myr-adelo was going through a familiar routine: that of serving dinner to strangers in the great baronial hall of the castle. There were candles on the table. In the flickering light of the flares and candles, she observed the men covertly. They were of a cut with all the rest who had trooped through Death Mountain Castle into oblivion. Whether they were Earthmen or Martian, they were always sullen-faced, perpetually on the alert to a point where the least untoward sound jerked their heads in its direction. Suddenly, she tensed. As she placed the roast on the table, she had glimpsed a familiar face.

She moved sedately toward the kitchen. There, Feto-cheer was pushing wood into the stove. "What do you make of these two?" he asked, raising his head.

Myr-adelo brushed past him into the back hallway. Up the stairs as fast as her short legs could carry her. She tripped over her skirt, then caught it up and held it above her knees.

She was still ludicrously holding it so when she came into Donna's room. "He's here, Miss Donna! That young man I saw in New City! The one they put in jail!" In her excitement, she slipped into the Martian dialect, but at the puzzled look on Donna's face, she realized what she was doing and continued so Donna could understand: "He's downstairs—your young man—with another man, having dinner with Milord—with Mr. Hakin! So he can't be your young man from New York. I think he must be a criminal of some kind."

Myr-adelo rushed away as she had come, leaving the door wide open. Donna crossed the room and closed it. She stood with her back against it, trying to adjust her mind to this new development. She refused to believe that Jack was here in the castle. This was utterly beyond reason. Then who was the man downstairs at the dinner table? Why had he taken Jack's name, and how had he gotten out of jail?

BUT, OVER all, Donna was disturbed and a little ashamed concerning her feelings toward Bruce Hakin. She distrusted him, feared him, and yet he had done nothing to merit this fear and distrust. She felt a personal guilt for nurturing that which sprang from her instincts. Two conflicting thoughts were making war within her. Predominating: the man I married is deeply evil. Torturing: I have no right to believe such a thing of my husband.

And, feeding the fears in her heart, was the haunting conviction that events in Death Mountain were quickening—rushing forward toward some terrible climax.

Donna moved across the room to her dressing table, dropped to the seat before it, and ran a comb through her hair. Again the thought of the man downstairs, and it was in her mind to doubt the sincerity of Clar-Myr-adelo. Was the woman lying? Playing some devious game of her own? She was, after all, an *arnos*, and they were noted for their criminal instincts, for their cannibalism, for their wildness and savagery. True, they had changed considerably during the last decades, but still. . . . While Donna wondered about

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Myr-adelo, she gave scarcely a thought to the woman's seemingly doltish brother.

This was not strange, because Feto-cheer's ugly face had one valuable asset: it had a very stupid look behind which was hidden an agile, crafty brain. And so well was that brain hidden, that even his own sister did not suspect his capabilities. She saw him as a grumpy, unimaginative work horse who minded his own business and insisted she mind hers. A man satisfied with their joint income and imbued with a fierce desire to see it continued.

She knew nothing of the small iron box under Feto-cheer's bed. It contained an ever-growing stack of gold and uranium, far more than could be retrieved from the salary they drew. This box was the center of Feto-cheer's world. So far as he was concerned, all things were measured in dollars and cents. He served Bruce Hakin, even though he knew Hakin to be a madman, for the simple reason that it paid well.

It was for this reason, also that Clar welcomed the arrival of visitors. He knew what was done to the majority of them. He acted as assistant in the room beyond the wall; looked on while Bruce Hakin used the knives and instruments upon these visitors. He had been there in the hidden room upon the night when Myr-adelo dropped the cream pitcher just beyond the wall; the night when Bruce Hakin had allowed the anesthetic to wear off while that lone unfortunate was strapped to the table.

Feto-cheer had seen the unholy look in Bruce Hakin's eyes that night, and had known then, beyond all doubt, that the man was mad. But it made no difference. His money was good, and he was generous with Feto-cheer. That was enough for the green *arnos*.

Feto-cheer knew Hakin was, in reality, two men—the embittered dreamer who sought refuge in fancies of ancient lordship; and a cold-blooded realist, head of a phantom empire that spanned the universe. There were certain facts of this empire which were hidden even from Feto-cheer; facets to wonder about during idle moments. He knew why the men came to the castle, but he knew nothing of Hakin's agents throughout the country—nothing of the outside connections that caused them to come and to know what they would find there. Feto-cheer felt he would never know about these things. But there was one secret he continually strove to uncover.

What happened to the men after their visit ended? It was an intriguing mystery he had never been able to solve. He knew what most of them got for the staggering fees Hakin imposed. He could account for the varied periods of time during which Myr-adelo left trays of food on the kitchen table. But there always came a night when the men vanished, and Clar-Feto-cheer was as much in the dark as his sister as to where they went.

Feto-cheer knew, of course, what had happened to Mike Kelly. Kelly, according to Hakin, was a spy, a lawman of some sort who'd come to the castle on false pretenses. That was why Hakin had allowed the anesthetic to wear off before he killed him.

Feto-cheer himself had carried Kelly's body up into the hills one dark night and buried it.

But what of the others? That was something Hakin kept strictly to himself.

IT WAS characteristic of Feto-cheer to have no fear whatever of his terrible employer. Feto-cheer feared nothing, dead or alive, except the thought of losing his money box. In

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fact, his only emotion relative to Hakin was one of contempt. The man was a weakling. A sadistic introvert who blamed his own sins on others. Feto-cheer, as one of his duties, had listened stolidly to Hakin's tirades whenever that particular mood was upon him.

"What chance would I have had as an honest man? Society rejected me for what I was! The son of a Martian and a crazy Earthman! They laughed behind my back! Everywhere I went I could hear them snickering."

Feto-cheer marveled at the way Hakin worked himself into a frenzy during these tirades; how he roared with laughter and said, "The blasted fools!"

And Feto-cheer marveled, also, at Hakin's ability to be two individuals—the frustrated sadist who took control at these times; and the suave dreamer who moved in story-book grandeur through a world of his own creation. An apparently harmless eccentric walking in his father's footsteps.

Feto-cheer had but one hope: that things would remain as they were; that the strangers would continue to appear out of nowhere bearing money, a portion of which found its way into his box.

There were two of them downstairs now, and, as was the custom at such times, Feto-cheer had come directly to his room from the kitchen to await orders. Some of the visitors demanded Hakin's services immediately; others were content to wait a few days. Thus, Feto-cheer never knew just when the room beyond the wall would be used.

Hakin's knock came a few minutes later. He entered the room, closing the door carefully behind him, and Feto-cheer asked, "Shall I get the instruments ready?"

Hakin did not answer immediately. He dropped into a chair and stretched his legs out in lazy comfort. He stared at Feto-cheer, and the latter became sharply aware of something in Hakin's eyes. The look he had seen when Kelly lay helpless on the table. The sadism brimming over and spilling out.

"No," Hakin said. "Not tonight. Tomorrow night, perhaps. And then you'll have another trip into the hills. We'll have quite a graveyard up there it this keeps on."

Feto-cheer was startled. "You mean—?"

"The elder one is a detective out of an agency on the Moon. He's been following me around for a long time. He evidently takes me for an idiot. Why do people take me for an idiot, Feto-cheer?"

Hakin was in a grandiloquent, expansive mood. The green man noted this, and even his cold senses cringed at what lay behind it. "I don't know why they'd do that. For the life of me, I don't know."

"You don't take me for a fool, do you, Feto-cheer?"

"Of course not. Are you sure this man is a detective?"

"Certainly. I'm always sure. And the younger one is familiar, too. I can't place him, though. Probably another operative I saw with Kane at some time or other."

"Then you plan to make short work of them?"

"Very short."

"Did they bring much money?"

"I doubt if they brought any. The stuff in the bag Kane has is probably some very good counterfeit. I don't think his backers would risk an outlay of cash."

"You don't think they suspect?"

"No. But Kane is bewildered as ever. He doesn't know what he's here for, and tried to find out all during dinner. I just showed them to their

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rooms, but I don't think Kane will do much sleeping."

"Tomorrow night, then?"

Hakin got to his feet and walked to the door.

"I was just thinking—" Feto-cheer started to say.

Hakin turned, his hand on the knob. "Thinking what?"

"If they brought no money with them. . ."

The handsome sadist knew what was in Feto-cheer's mind. "You're worried about your pay. Is that it, Feto-cheer?"

"Well, if their money is counterfeit—"

"Have I ever treated you other than well in that respect?"

"I've always been well paid. You have been most generous."

"And I will continue to be. Now, go to bed."

Hakin left, and Feto-cheer dragged his iron chest from under the bed. He never retired before counting the stack of bills that it contained. As others said their nightly prayers, Feto-cheer counted his money.

ONE AMBITION was paramount in Jack Barron's mind. He had to see Donna. He sat through dinner paying but scant attention to the conversation. He had no great interest in Kane's leading questions and Hakin's bland, guarded answers.

Alone now in his room, he paced the floor, a scowl on his face. All during dinner he'd expected Donna to appear. Her continued absence made him fearful. Was something wrong? Was Hakin holding her prisoner somewhere? Was she still alive?

He came alert at the sound of knuckles on the door panel, only to register disappointment as the door opened and Kane came into the room.

"Where do you suppose she is?" Jack asked. "Where is he hiding her?"

"You mean his wife?"

"Donna, of course! Who else would I mean?"

Kane was frowning, distinctly ill at ease. "She's probably in her room. I doubt if he lets her dine with the type of thugs he entertains. Forget about that for a while. It's not our main problem."

"It's my main problem."

Kane, deep in his own troubles, didn't seem to hear Jack's retort. "The man is so damn clever. Down there at dinner, I got the idea he was playing with us, enjoying himself. I had a feeling he was way ahead of me all the time. But he can't know me. I've been so careful all the way through."

"Maybe he knows me."

Kane stood regarding the pitch-soaked flare in his niche on the wall. He turned quickly. "Did he ever see you?"

"Not that I know of. I never saw him before tonight. But he spent a lot of time in New York."

Kane sighed. "It was a chance we had to take, so there's no use weeping over it now." He scowled afresh. "If I only had something to go on, even a vague idea of what happens—"

"I didn't hear him give you any leads at dinner."

"I think he was careful not to."

"Why didn't you ask him point blank what he could do for us. You told him when we got here that we'd come blind. We aren't supposed to know what he does."

"That's true. But he didn't seem to want to talk about it. When he left me in my room, he said we'd get down to business tomorrow. I guess that's the way we'll have to leave it."

"Did he ask to see the money?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"No." Kane shrugged and started toward the door. "You get some sleep," he said. "We'll see what tomorrow brings." With that, he left.

But Jack Barron had other plans. He was going to find Donna, and the only way he could do this was to start hunting for her. Donna was somewhere in this weird nightmare of a castle. If she still lived, she was probably imprisoned in one of the stone rooms.

Jack's job was to find that room. There was the risk of finding that accursed husband of Donna's at the same time, but this Jack felt he must risk. He'd worry about that danger when it confronted him.

After giving Joe Kane time to get safely away, Jack slipped out into the hall and clung close to the shadowed wall. There was enough darkness to cover his movements. Two pitch-flares, placed at far intervals, furnished only dim, flickering light.

Jack's room as in a wing of the castle, and this particular section had the smell, the feeling, of emptiness. Jack opened two doors, gently, slowly. With his eyes adjusted to the darkness, he discovered that both rooms were empty; barren even of furnishings, they presented only grim stone walls.

He gave up trying in the wing and went forward to the main hall at the head of the grand staircase. Here, three flares flickered in the niches, giving off giant shadows in which he found shelter.

HE WAS ABOUT to move on, when footsteps on the stairs nailed him tight into a dark corner. A cone of light approached, moving higher; the feeble circle of a candle, and the handsome figure of Bruce Hakin came into view. Hakin was a regal, ghostly eminence in the gloom; a seemingly disembodied wrath of sinister implication there on the stairs. His presence added just the right unreal touch to this whole unreal scene.

He turned left and stood for a moment, undecided. Then, he moved on down the main hall, turning in finally at a doorway, a small pool of light in a sea of darkness.

And Jack's reaction was sharp and definite. The poor kid! he thought. Tied up to a spook like that! How did she manage to stand it for even an hour?

Skirting the wall, he followed Hakin down the hall. Some of his hope was gone now. Donna could easily be in the room with Hakin. But there was a chance she had a room of her own and if this were true, Hakin had no doubt given Jack its general location.

He arrived at the spot where Hakin had disappeared and chose the door exactly opposite the one Hakin had used. It opened on bare walls. He went through the darkness toward the next. He turned the knob slowly and pressed against the panel. His reward was a streak of faint light along the jamb. He pushed inward, widening the crack, broadening it enough to accommodate one eye. Then he stood there—frozen.

There was a large candelabra overhead in the room into which he was looking. There was a great canopied bed, thick luxurious rugs, and bright tapestries on the walls.

The candelabra threw a circle of light down on a spot in front of a mirrored dressing table. And, in the center of that light-circle, stood Donna.

Her arms were upraised as she combed her hair, and her head was thrown back. She stood there: a slim, lithe, living flame, in a diaphanous gown that revealed rather than concealed her body.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack stared without a trace of shame. He was looking at not just a beautiful girl. This was Donna, once pledged to him; and so far as Jack Barron was concerned at that moment, she was still pledged. He was looking at a part of himself.

He slipped into the room and drew the door to. As his back pressed against it, he called, "Donna," very softly.

The name carried. Donna whirled, facing the door. Following a first instinct, she gathered her gown close around her and clawed backward, blindly, toward the bed. Her first thought was: He's come! At last this is the time and he's come! My husband is here!

But she still groped for the robe, got her hand on it, and drew it toward her.

"It's me, Donna! Jack! I've come for you darling! You knew I'd come, didn't you?"

Realization dawned. Donna's hand opened and the robe dropped to the floor. He was standing there, close in front of her. Her arms went toward him. Her lips parted but no sound came from then. Her body followed her arms and her face was buried in his shoulder.

"Jack! Oh, my darling Jack! Oh, Jack! it's been *horrible!*"

This was not a betrayal of marriage vows. It was a natural, inescapable reaction to the appearance, seemingly out of nowhere, of the man she loved. There was no thought in her mind at that moment of Bruce Hakin or Death Mountain Castle. There was only the indescribable joy of feeling Jack's heart close to her own.

She was in a swimming void with but one anchor to cling to. How long the void lasted, she didn't know. It could have been seconds or minutes.

THEN, IT vanished at the sound of a low, magnetic voice: "How stupid of me. Of course I know you. Pug Nixon indeed! Your name is Jack Barron. You were a clerk in the offices of Charles King in New York."

Donna raised her head and saw Bruce Hakin in the exact place she'd seen Jack Barron: standing with back to the door, leaning casually against the panel.

Feto-cheer had just gotten to sleep when he was awakened by a rough hand on his shoulder. "Come out of it! Come alive! The plans are changed. We will use the room tonight!"

Feto-cheer opened his eyes to see Hakin bending over him, and Feto-cheer's first hazy, sleep-rimmed thought was: something's happened. He's gone off the deep end again. Or maybe he just can't wait to cut somebody up.

Feto-cheer pushed his feet over the edge of the bed and rubbed a huge paw over his narrow slanted forehead. "Give me a minute to get dressed."

"I want you to go to Kane's room, the one who calls himself Tom Matson, and bring him to the room. I'll be waiting there."

"How'll I do that? How'll I make him come?"

"Tell him something has come up and we must act fast. Tell him anything. He may be suspicious, but he'll come because he can't afford to do otherwise."

Hakin was just going through the door when Feto-cheer called. "What about the other one, the young one?"

"I've taken care of him for the time being," Hakin said. There was a note of savageness in his voice, cut off by the slamming door.

Feto-cheer got into his clothes and shuffled down the long hall of the west wing. He stopped in front of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joe Kane's room and beat loud on the panel. The detective had a gun and Feto-cheer felt that his nerves would probably be on edge. The green man wanted no stray bullets in his way. "Mr. Matson! It's the serving man, Clar-Feto-cheer. I got a message for you from Mr. Hakin. Can I come in?"

There was a pause, after which a key grated in the lock and the door opened. Joe Kane stood there holding a Martian .5 Atom revolver, and a candle. "Well, what's all the fuss about?"

"Excuse me, please, Mr. Matson, but Mr. Hakin said to tell you his plans have been changed. He's got to go away early in the morning, so he wants to talk business with you now. About the money, I think."

"I want to know what we're getting first. I don't know whether I want to hole up in this tomb or not. Maybe we weren't very smart in coming here."

"Oh, don't worry about that, sir. Mr. Hakin has helped a lot of men. A lot of them come here and there's never any trouble."

"What does Hakin do for them?"

"It isn't my place to talk about that, sir. In fact, I don't know much about it. Mr. Hakin has a private room, so if you'll just follow me."

There was still a shade of hesitation in Kane's mind. Feto-cheer could see it flickering in his eyes. "It's all right to bring your gun," Feto-cheer said. "And your satchel."

Kane turned toward the bed. He'd made his decision. In fact, there was only one decision possible. He couldn't back down now. A hidden room had been mentioned, and that was exactly what Kane had come to Death Mountain Castle to see.

He shoved the revolver into his waistband and followed the *arnos* down the shadowy hall. The satchel was clutched in his left hand, and his mind was busy trying to project the future.

The blowup would no doubt come when and if Hakin spotted the counterfeit currency he carried in the bag. Therefore, there was only one course open to Kane. He had to stall as long as possible; refuse to show the money until he found out what Hakin intended giving him in return for it. He could spend some time haggling over whatever fee Hakin demanded. As before, he would be jumping from bog to bog like a man crossing a marsh.

THE PRIMITIVE hulk that was Clar-Feto-cheer moved along the hall, past the grand staircase and into the right wing of the castle. Feto-cheer traveled with a leisure that was maddening to the nerve-tight Davis. The *arnos* turned a corner then—without warning—and Kane followed to discover the man leaning hard against a section of the wall.

As Kane watched, the great stone block moved inward and swung away on silent hinges. Feto-cheer stepped aside, motioning toward Kane. The detective took one careful step and peered into the opening. A spot of light, far below, snatched at his eyes and drew them downward; a flaring torch; a yellow finger beckoning down toward the very bowels of the castle. Kane stepped back. "You first," he said grimly.

The stolid Feto-cheer went through the opening without comment and down the flight of narrow stairs. Kane followed. The stairway seemed much longer than it really was. Had Kane counted, he would have ticked off thirty-four steps before the *arnos* made a sharp right turn under the torch in the wall bracket. A stone tunnel now, reaching off into darkness.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After a time of echoing footsteps, the Martian stopped, and Kane heard the sound of his knuckles on wood. A door opened. Feto-cheer walked on into yellow.

And Kane also. But, just at the threshold, he stumbled and pitched forward headfirst. His interest in the lighted room kept him from noticing the deep shadow which was Bruce Hakin, standing flat against the wall at the end of the dark tunnel. Hakin's blow caught the detective just at the base of the skull and sent him, unconscious, on into the lighted room.

Feto-cheer was surprised. "Why didn't you tell me you wanted him that way? I could have done it any time on the way down. I'd have enjoyed that."

Hakin's black eyes were smouldering. They seemed to encompass all and yet nothing. They were filled with a turbulent motion, and yet they were still. "I have other things for you to do—immediately—while I arrange things here. I want you to go to my wife's bedchamber. There, you will find my wife tied in a chair. Also, her lover on the floor, bound with sash cords. Leave him where he is for the time being, and bring my wife to me. I'll be waiting in the great hall."

If these orders excited Feto-cheer, he gave no sign. He said, "I'll bring her there," stepped over Kane's inert body, and shuffled down the hall.

Donna was learning the taste of pure mental anguish; the feeling of one hopelessly trapped. And this was not caused by the ropes binding her to the chair. These she scarcely considered. It had been the trapping of her mind that caused the pain. The sudden thud of realization. There was nothing I could do. Nothing. And he knew it. I can tell he knew it by the way he ignored me as he walked across the room holding the gun on Jack. He actually turned his back on me when he hit Jack. He bent over Jack's body when he tied him up and ignored me completely. I could have hit him. I could have picked up the gun he lay on the bed and shot him through the heart.

But I didn't do it.

I stood there helpless, held by some power he has in his devilish eyes. I wanted to kill him. But I couldn't move. I couldn't do it, and he knew I couldn't do it.

This was helplessness in its purest form; imprisoned by a force, an invisible drive, the evil power in a pair of eyes. I sat down at his command, Donna thought bitterly. And I let him tie me up.

The door opened and the Martian *arnos* Feto-cheer came into the room. Donna allowed a flash of hope to rise within her. This gradually died as the stolid green man knelt down beside the still-unconscious Jack Barron. Examined the bruise on his head and emitted a grunt of satisfaction. He got to his feet and approached Donna.

His attitude was entirely impersonal. She could have been a stranger he'd never seen before. He loosed the cords holding her ankles to the chair legs and pulled her to her feet; her wrists were tied behind her back, and a separate strand of cording was around her waist holding her to the chair.

Feto-cheer undid the latter and pulled her to her feet. "He's waiting for you downstairs," the Martian said. "Move along." And he prodded her gently.

IT WAS AS though Bruce Hakin had carefully planned the scene that followed. He sat in a great carved chair in the center of the cavernous main floor hall—and sat there waiting. Followed by Clar-Feto-cheer, Donna walked down the grand stair-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

way and crossed a hundred feet of bare stone floor to stand—wrists bound—in front of him. The scene was that of a conqueror ready to mete out sentence to a prisoner.

"You may leave us," Hakin said to Feto-cheer. "There are two things I want you to do. Lock your sister in her room so that I will not be disturbed. Then, go to the surgery and await my further orders."

Without a word, the *arnos* turned back toward the stairs. Bruce Hakin sat silent until the Martian was out of earshot. When he spoke, it was in his usual low, compelling voice. "I loved you very much," he said.

Donna's first instinct was to speak in her own defense; to let all her fears and hatreds flood out. But this suddenly seemed a futile thing to do. A waste of words; a plea for a lost cause. "I have never once said that I loved you."

"But you made a bargain. I expected you to stand by it."

"I have known all along that you didn't love me." He spoke gently, and with the statement came a sort of pathetic wistfulness, making him in Donna's eyes, almost human for a fleeting second. "I knew that my love for you could hardly be answered in kind," he went on, "in so short a time. But I was willing to wait, to let you draw toward me naturally of your own free will, because that was the way I wanted you—willing and freely. For that reason, I deliberately restrained myself and did not press upon you in any manner."

Donna held her head high. "That may be true," she replied, "although I don't believe it, not the 'freely and willingly' part. You've deliberately instituted some sort of an influence over me. What it is I do not know, but you do. It has something to do with your eyes. I can't explain it, but tonight I was powerless to make a move up there in my room. You knew I was powerless, so please don't deny it."

Bruce Hakin shrugged. "It doesn't matter now. The picture has changed. It is not at all extraordinary, this thing which had happened. I should have expected it."

"You mean, of course, the scene in my bedroom that you interpreted as unfaithfulness. You were wrong. That was a matter of quick moment, over which I would soon have gotten control. But regardless of what you think, I see no reason for you to insult me by saying you expected it. I have done nothing to merit that remark."

He raised a languid hand. "I was not referring to you. I meant that my own evil destiny could not be overlooked by the gods who wrote the finale for this human comedy. They demand the ironic twist. You see, my dear, I am the son of a mad eccentric Earthman who bought a Martian *rees* as wife. All her life she hated him—hated him with a fierce, almost pathologic hatred. Now, to remain in character, fate has ordained for me to select a promiscuous, cheap floozy, who hated me, but was hypocrite enough to marry me for what she could get."

Donna's eyes blazed. The crimson flooded into her face. She flung her head backward as though he had slapped her across the mouth.

HE STOOD up now, and flung his words as though each one were a barbed pellet. "Now the scene changes. You have forfeited all rights so far as I'm concerned. From this moment on, you aren't my wife. You are my property. You are on the same level with my horse, or my dog, or a beautiful picture on my wall. From now on, I do with you as I please."

Donna stood mute. After waiting

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the reply that did not come, Bruce Hakin turned her about roughly and undid the cords around her wrists. "We will go to your room," he said. "I have made a new set of plans which go into effect immediately. We are leaving here, but first I have several things to do. Hurry up!"

They mounted the stairs and went to Donna's room. Inside they found that Jack Barron had returned to consciousness. Helpless on the floor, he writhed in his bonds.

"Save your energy," Hakin told him. "You could never loosen those ropes."

There was no anger in Jack's face, only fear. "Listen. It was my fault! You can't do anything to Donna. I forced my way in. She told me to get out, but I came in and grabbed her. I—"

"You're wasting your breath," Hakin said. He turned to Donna. "I want you to dress for travel. We'll be taking a very long trip soon, and I want you to be ready."

He strode to the cabinet at the side of the room and pulled out a pair of riding breeches and a soft silk shirt. Then, a pair of boots. He brought these items of apparel back and tossed them on a chair. "Put these on," he ordered.

Donna picked up the garments and took a step toward the bathroom. Hakin flung up a hand. "Right here. Right now. I don't want to let you out of my sight."

Donna's face flamed again, and Jack snarled a curse through his teeth. "You foul, crawling bastard!"

Hakin himself with effort. His eyes remained on Donna. "Do as I say."

Jack rolled in a half-turn and lay facing the opposite direction. The muscles on his back flexed as he strained against the cords.

Again, there were those terrible chains wrapped tight around Donna's mind, holding her will-power helpless. What is it? She asked silently. What power has he got? Why must I do what he tells me? Why doesn't his power yield when I fight it?

And all the time her hands were obeying her subconscious mind. Stripping away the clothing from her body until Hakin's eyes were boring, coldly, impersonally, into her bare flesh. He did not so much as flicker an eyelash until she stood before him, dressed as he had ordered.

"You will come with me," he said, and left the bedroom. She followed him out into the hall and into the right wing of the building. He stopped before a dark opening which was not a door, but a section of wall pushed back on a hinge to reveal a narrow stairway.

Here, Bruce Hakin turned and faced Donna. He stood spread-legged, his hands behind his back, his black eyes brooding. He said, "You and your lover have probably spent a lot of time wondering about Death Mountain Castle. He probably asked you many questions about me and this place. You, of course, could not answer them. But now, as you will not see him again, it pleases my sense of the—shall we say ironic?—to give you some of those answers."

He took a pitch-flare from the wall and thrust it into her hand. Then he took one for himself. "Please precede me down the stairs," he said.

Donna shrank back. Only her fear predominated now. She was in mortal terror of descending into the castle's bowels with this madman. But it was no use. Hakin did not even have to repeat the command. His eyes gave the order, and Donna stepped into the opening and felt blindly for the stairway. To the frightened girl, this seemed the pathway to hell. The light

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loomed larger, down below, and then Bruce Hakin was saying, "Please turn to the right."

They traversed the echoing tunnel, arriving at last at the door which blocked further progress. Bruce Hakin reached forward and pushed it open. He followed Donna inside.

THE IMPACT of what struck her eyes, drove even the fear from Donna's mind. She stood staring about her in amazement. Here there were no dim, flickering torches. The light came from bright, steady lamps of some sort, fed evidently with artificial gas. And no gray stone walls were in evidence. Everything from floor to ceiling was glistening white. There were shelves lined with bottles of varying sizes—cabinets in which reposed rows of bright steel instruments. Donna stood as though struck dumb, and Hakin's soothing voice filled the room.

"There isn't a finer equipped operating room in the entire universe than this one," he said. A look of bitterness came into his face. He held forth both hands, fingers spread. "Nor a more able pair of surgeon's hands ever created than my own. I could have done great things. I could have been honored; could have made surgical history, if my background hadn't whipped me before I started. The whole universe was against me. Wherever I went—on Mars they remembered my crazy father, and how he married my mother who hated him. And she was right. I hated him too. But they laughed at me on Mars. On Earth they laughed at my father, and they laughed at my Martian mother too. I hate them all. And they're going to suffer for not accepting me the way I wanted to be accepted."

Even in her state of surprise, Donna could not neglect a rebuttal of his statements. "I see it now. I don't know what you do here, I don't know why that unconscious man is lying strapped to your operating table.

"But I do know this: it's something horrible. Your entire life has been horrible, because you made it so. And you've chosen to placate your own conscience, if you have any, by putting the blame on your parents, who deserve none of it. If your mother hated your father, that was her business, and his, but nobody else's. Nobody laughed at them. Nobody laughs at you. Hundreds of Earthmen have married Martians—*rees* as well as *arnos*. It's a very common sight here now. Your father was just one of the first to do so.

"Nobody hates you; you hate yourself. You are filled with a hatred and contempt for all people which is so deep, it is crazy. I pity you. You're rotten—indescribably rotten!"

He chose to ignore this; to ignore her words, as he had always ignored truth and reality. "I am a surgeon," he said. "Probably the world's best. And I certainly have the world's strangest clientele. Brigands and felons and blacklegs from all over the universe come to me loaded down with their loot. For a fee, I practice my skills upon them. I find it interesting and lucrative to make certain changes in their appearance. I can make an ugly Martian *arnos* look like a *rees*. I can change the appearance of an Earthman so that even his mother wouldn't recognize him. I am the most skilled plastic surgeon in the entire universe." He smiled, and elaborate sarcasm came into his voice. "It is my contribution to society's welfare."

Donna pointed. "That man on the table."

At this point, Feto-cheer, who had been waiting silently in one corner of the room, came forward and approached the operating table, where

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Joe Kane lay. The detective was strapped hand and foot. His eyes were closed.

The green man expertly lifted an eyelid and scanned the tissue underneath. "I thought he was dead for a minute," he said to Hakin. "I could hardly hear his heartbeat."

Hakin ignored Feto-cheer and answered Donna's question. "A stupid private detective named Kane. This is the second time an operative has made his way into my home. There was another one who called himself Kelly. I was forced to kill him, of course."

"Are you going to kill this one?"

"Certainly. But his death will not be useless. There are some experiments I wish to make."

Donna felt a sickness rising within her. She swayed. "And Jack Barron..."

Hakin frowned. Indicating Donna, he spoke sharply to Feto-cheer. "I want you to take her out of the castle," he said. "I have a great deal to do, and she will only be in my way. Take her to that hidden sand flat near the place you buried Kelly. Then, when I'm ready to leave, I'll pick her up there."

"Shall I stay there and watch her?"

Hakin frowned. He was silent for a moment while he considered. "No, I'll need you here. Take a long stake and an ankle chain. Drive the stake deep. I'm holding you responsible."

This startled even the phlegmatic primitive man. "You mean just—just stake her out and leave her there?"

"That's right," Hakin said. His eyes bored deep into those of Donna. "My wife understands, even though you don't."

FETO-CHEER shrugged and moved toward Donna. "I'll have to get a chain," he said.

While he was gone, Hakin paid no attention to the girl. He seemed to forget she even existed. He went to one of the cabinets and began to move instruments. One by one he lifted them, examined each one critically, and laid them on a table.

And the torture in Donna's mind had grown apace; grown with the positive evidence that she was dealing with a madman. Under his cold exterior was the boiling cauldron she'd suspected, but she knew now it would not erupt in violence. The violence would seep out little by little in deliberately calculated acts such as the one he planned to perpetrate upon the unconscious Kane.

Jack tied hand and foot up in the castle. What did Hakin intend to do with him? Donna wanted to ask, but she was held back by both dread of the answer and this strange lethargy which had seemingly become a part of her. She fought against it, tried to drive it from her. But then Feto-cheer was back in the room carrying a burlap sack over his shoulder. "I'm ready," he said.

Without looking up from his work, Hakin said, "Take her out by way of the tunnel. It will be quicker."

Feto-cheer grasped Donna by the wrist and walked toward the blank wall of the room—toward the wall opposite the door. Here, he put down the sack and pressed against its white surface. Another door—a section of the wall—opened silently. A wave of cold, dank air hit Donna, bringing a chill that tightened her skin. Without ceremony, Feto-cheer dragged her through into darkness. The wall closed behind them.

They were in some sort of tunnel; no more than this was apparent to Donna. She could see nothing in the blackness, but her arm brushed against damp rock and the sound of their footsteps told her the ceiling

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was low. She faltered and hung back.

Feto-cheer went forward straight into the smothering black. The pathway trended downward and, from somewhere far, Donna heard muted whispers—a strange, continuous sound—as from a great wind moaning through echoing places; yet, not entirely like a wind; remindful of a million bats whirring and scraping in a cavern.

Abruptly, Feto-cheer turned to the left, pulling Donna along a new path. This one slanted upward, and it became obvious to Donna that they were moving away from the place of the sounds. Fainter and fainter grew the echoes as the two moved up a steep incline.

Entirely sure of himself, the Martian rounded a bend. Then, he dropped his sack and heaved his powerful shoulder against a rock around which there was a halo of faint light. The rock moved and there was the early morning sky up above; a sky washed of stars by the first rays of false dawn.

Feto-cheer pushed Donna through the opening and climbed up after her. He pushed the rock back into place and the girl realized that, once away from this place, she could never find it again.

They were in a field of boulders spread indiscriminately in all directions, as though flung from a giant hand. In the semi-darkness, these great boulders seemed to Donna like living, crouching things.

Feto-cheer took her again by the wrist and began threading a way toward some point beyond. They arrived eventually in a small, pocketed amphitheater, the floor of which showed white and bare in the ever-increasing light. Feto-cheer dropped his sack and released his hold on Donna. "Don't try to run," he growled. "You couldn't get a hundred yards. I know this land. You don't."

Donna did not run. But it was not Feto-cheer's warning that held her motionless. It was something else; some feeling of the inevitable; a mental weariness clouding even the horror of what she'd been through. The thoughts in her mind were like the beating of a monotonous rhythm on a drum: what will happen to Jack? What will happen to me? Will he kill Jack as he intends to kill the other man? With his bright knives? Will he take me away, or does he really intend to leave me in this place to die?

FETO-CHEER had driven an iron stake deep into the hard ground. He dropped his hammer and tested the stake. It was in deep enough, he decided. There was a chain fastened to the stake, and an iron anklet at the chain's other end. This he fastened around Donna's ankle, then stepped back to survey his work. He watched as Donna sank to the ground and covered her face with her hands.

"I brought you some water," he said. "It will get pretty hot here when the sun starts beating down. Awful hot, and you'll need water." He drew a canteen from the burlap bag and set it on the ground within her reach. Again he stepped back. "I don't think he'll leave you here very long. It gets too hot."

The Martian servant turned away without another word, and Donna thought she was alone. Then, as she uncovered her eyes, she saw him still standing there as though threshing out some problem. He shook his head and muttered, "No. I guess I better not. He didn't say anything about giving you water. It might make him mad. The water was my own idea."

With that, the *arnos* picked up the canteen, drew the cap and emptied the water down into the ground at his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feet where it was instantly absorbed. He dropped the can and left without a backward glance.

At first there was a chill in the air. Donna sat shivering on the ground. But the chill was dissipated with appalling swiftness. The sun came blazing over the white plains to bring the fierce blasting heat for which this land is famous.

Donna had examined the chain, the stake, and the iron anklet which imprisoned her. The stake was deep in the ground—solid as bed-rock: the chain-links were sturdy, and the anklet fitted tight around her boot just above the foot.

I hope he leaves me here, Donna told herself. I hope he forgets about me. Of the two evils, this is the easiest to face. But as the suns mounted higher, as her throat dried out and the heat rays began driving like needles into her aching head, she was not so sure. She was no longer sure of anything, because she could no longer think clearly. By the time the suns were lowering toward Death Mountain, she lay motionless under their diminishing heat.

When she heard running footsteps, she opened her eyes and raised herself in their direction, not knowing what to expect and hardly caring.

Then, through the haze before her eyes, she saw a grinning, bloody man approaching her. She cried, "Jack! Jack! What has he done to you?" But the words stayed far back in her throat. He heard them only when he was on his knees beside her.

He laughed, and it was in Donna's mind to wonder. Could this be Jack, or was her mind playing a trick? Was this the staid, dignified officer clerk she'd known in some distant place and time? His shirt was completely torn away. There were blue bruises on his body and a gash down one cheek from which blood had sluiced down his neck and chest. One tooth was missing from his grin—snapped off at the gum—but for all this, he looked far more competent, more joyfully alive, than she'd ever seen him.

"What did he do to you?"

He lifted her head and brushed the hair back from her forehead. His eyes searched her face, and there came into them a look of relief. "You're all right," he said. "You've been through hell, but I got here in time." He took a key from his pocket and applied it to the anklet.

"Tell me," Donna said. "What happened?"

Jack Barron laughed. "That Martian—what's his name? Feto-cheer—I lay there in your bedroom trussed up like a pig for hours. Then he came and took me down into a dungeon in the basement. He was going to chain me to the wall, but I got one in. I kicked him square in the belly, and from there out we had fun. I smashed his nose and broke some of his ribs and then asked him some questions. He didn't want to answer, so I wrapped a chain around his neck and watched his face turn blue. I never had so much fun in my life. Honest! When he told me what he'd done with you, I even remembered to get the key from him."

He lifted Donna to her feet. "Can you walk?"

She swayed toward him, then straightened. "I'm all right. I can walk."

Jack looked at her, a trifle puzzled. He wiped some blood from his cheek. "I wonder what the hell we do now. I wonder what happened to Joe Kane."

"There's a room in the basement of the castle. Bruce Hakin took me there and I saw Kane on a table. He was tied down. It's an operating room,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack. He—he was going to experiment on Kane!"

Jack turned away. "Then I've got to go back. You wait here. It won't take long."

Dona ran forward and caught him by the arm. "No. I won't stay here! I'll go with you. How can you find the room without me?"

Jack considered. "That's right." He grinned again. "Sure, come on, honey. These characters are all pushovers—all of them. I'm the boss-man around here now." And taking Donna in his arms, he kissed the dry, caked lips and laughed again.

THEY CROSSED the slope and approached the castle from the rear. The Martian night was fast lowering. The castle loomed somber, unreal, in the gloom. The kitchen, through which they entered, was dark, deserted. Holding tight to Jack's hand, Donna followed him into the main hall. They approached the grand staircase.

Then, Jack's hand tightened on Donna's, as they stopped. Jack crouched, peering ahead, and Donna gasped. In the flickering light of a single flare, they saw one figure lying prone on the floor. Beside it crouched another, shoulders sagging, face white in the dimness.

The voice they heard was flat; stunned as though washed clean of all emotion. "Help him. Please! Please help him."

"It's Myr-adelo," Donna whispered. She was down beside the kneeling Martian woman. "What happened? Is your brother hurt? Let me see."

"Mr. Hakin shot him. Mr. Hakin was coming down the stairs and Feto-cheer met him here. My brother asked him for our money. I'd been locked in my room all day and my brother had just let me out. When he asked Mr. Hakin for what we had coming, Mr. Hakin just shot him."

Jack's head was pressed close down on Feto-cheer's chest. Jack straightened. "It's too late," he said. "The man's dead. You can't do anything for him. Where is Mr. Hakin?"

"I don't know. He was working down in the dungeons all day. Feto-cheer said he was helping him move a lot of boxes in the rooms down there. I don't know where he is now."

Jack Barron scowled. "You two get out of here. Walk toward town and I'll catch up with you. We're dealing with a madman, and God alone knows what will happen."

"There's a better way," Donna said, lifting the stricken Martian woman to her feet. "We'll stay with you. There's a way out through a tunnel off the room Joe Kane is in—or was in. Come. I'll show you."

They went up the broad staircase; they walked softly, momentarily expecting the crazed Bruce Hakin to loom from a shadowy place to bar their way. But the upper level was ghostly still, and Donna found the entrance to the narrow stairway slightly ajar. Down below, in the tunnel, the flare was still a flickering yellow finger. "I'll go first," Jack said. "Stay close behind me."

At the foot of the stairs, Jack snatched the flare from its bracket. "You turn right here," Donna said. Then, a few moments later, "That's the door to the room."

Jack pushed it open. After a single quick look into the room, he went rigid, then raised his arms as though to block their entrance. "Come on in and close this door," he said. "But don't look! For God's sake, don't look at the table! Keep your eyes away from it and show me where that tunnel is."

Donna tried to obey, but the room was small. The operating table came

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

within range of her vision and a cry escaped her lips. A sickness welled up within her, and then Jack stepped between her and the table. "We've got to get out of here," he snapped. "We're dealing with a homicidal maniac. You can't figure a man like that! You just get away. Where's the tunnel?"

Myr-adelo, in the act of closing the door, stopped and stood frozen. Stood terrorized, and the three of them heard the rushing footsteps growing louder on the stairs outside. "He's coming!" the woman moaned. "God help us! He's coming down the stairs!"

Jack leaped forward and slammed the door. "If I was alone!" he yelled, and there was a helpless rage in his voice. "Damn it to hell, if I was only alone! Where's that tunnel entrance?"

Donna was across the room pushing on the wall as she had seen Feto-cheer push. The panel moved inward, slowly, and in the hallway they'd just quitted was the sound of weight flung against the door; then the thunder of a pistol shot.

Jack pushed hard on the panel. It opened with maddening slowness. There still wasn't room for Donna to squeeze through when a slug smashed through the door on the other side. Then, she was out in the tunnel with Myr-adelo following, when the other door burst open.

WHAT HAPPENED wasn't quite clear to either Jack or Donna. Without doubt, Jack was standing by the panel, a a perfect target, when Hakin broke the door and burst into the room. And Myr-adelo was halfway into the tunnel. But suddenly she was not there. She was back in the room. Her face was a green blazing thing. Her arms moved and Jack was catapulted into the tunnel. He fell, still clutching the flare and turned as he hit the ground to see a flash of frozen action he would never forget.

Clar-Myr-adelo standing there facing the mad Hakin, her head high in valiant defiance. These were her words: "You murdering scum! You rotten—"

The thunder of the gun and Myr-adelo turning slowly, trying to raise her hands to her face. Only there was no face, just a red, gushing emptiness. Then, she swayed backwards and the panel settled into place, shutting out the scene.

Jack got to his feet. "He's killing everyone he meets!" Jack yelled. "And I haven't got a gun! I've got to get you out of here! He's a murdering maniac!"

"It's this way," Donna said. "Let me have the flare. There's a side entrance to the main tunnel."

"You go on! You go find it and get out of here! I'll get myself a rock and go back inside!"

"I won't go without you! I won't, Jack! We'll stay together."

Jack's shoulders appeared to sag, and gone was the bright, cocky youth of a short time before. "All right—all right. Let's get started. I can't leave you on your own. I know that."

They went down the tunnel together, moved in a pool of yellow light, and again Donna heard the whisperings as of a million bats or a muted wind. They went on and on and the sound grew louder.

"Funny," Jack muttered. "He didn't follow us. I wonder why. I wonder what he's got up his sleeve?"

But Jack ceased wondering when Donna spoke. There was a sob in her voice as she said, "I've missed it, Jack! I know it wasn't this far. I thought I knew where it was, but there are so many of those little openings, and they all look alike. I—we're lost, darling!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We can't go back. He may know we missed the outlet and be waiting for us. We can't put the flare out; we'd be sunk without it."

"Oh, my darling!"

"We'll go on. This tunnel leads somewhere." Jack raised the flare and laughed grimly. "Maybe we'll find the graveyard Joe Kane was looking for."

In the light of the flare, Donna was no longer beautiful. Her looks were in keeping with this terrible place. Her hair was caked and matted; her face streaked with grime; her lips cracked and swollen.

Jack put an arm around her and drew her close. He grinned. "You look like the grandmother of all witches," he said. "I never realized you were so ugly, honey." And he kissed her roughly—hurt her lips with his own.

Donna found sudden blessed comfort in her words and in his roughness. She drew away, and her smile was little more than a hideous grimace. "You're no collar ad yourself darling."

He laughed, and the tunnel sent back echoes. "Let's go find the graveyard," he said.

They moved forward, eyes tensed to the darkness. Jack spoke first. "I wonder what that noise is. It's been getting louder. Bats maybe?"

"I've been wondering. It can't be far off."

"No. We seem almost on top of it."

"It's like—"

"Look out! For God's sake! Look out!"

Donnna screamed as Jack's arm snaked out and hurled her backwards. She saw him standing above her as she went down. He was teetering, swaying, fighting for balance. Then, he took a step backward and leaned against the wall.

Donna got slowly to her feet, and for an unmeasured time they stood there, eyes riveted to what was before them. Then, Jack's voice was an awed whisper: "I'll be damned for a blundering fool. So this is it. So this is the secret of Death Mountain."

He raised the torch over his head, and what it revealed put the final stamp of weird unreality on all that had gone before.

FROM THE darkness on their right, came a swift, whispering river; an eerie ribbon of black water, touched now with ripples of silver by the light of the torch. Out of nowhere, it swept past them; straight toward the mountain, to disappear into darkness beyond range of the flare.

"Now we know," Jack said. "This ties the whole thing together. It makes the pattern complete." The awe was still in his voice.

"I—I still don't understand."

"Joe Kane told me all about it. Now, the story is complete. Old Jimmy Hakin found this river years ago. He built his castle over the tunnel and kept the secret from everyone but his son. Obviously, this river has an outlet somewhere beyond the mountain range on the other side of the planet. From there, he must have a space ship which took these men back to Earth, or enabled them to circle around and come onto Mars from the other side where the spaceport is."

"Then, this was how the men escaped—the men Bruce Hakin operated on?"

"I didn't know that."

"He told me when he showed me the room. He was a skilled surgeon, and he changed their faces so they wouldn't be recognized. He—"

There was a sudden peal of thunder from behind them, and the solid rock beneath their feet shivered from the impact. Jack pulled Donna to him,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and they crouched against the wall. A sudden wind came sweeping down the tunnel. Jack's teeth were white—flashing in the light of the flare.

"You know what that was? You know what he's doing? The maniac's blowing up the castle! Those boxes Myr-adelo told us about. Dynamite! And that's why he didn't follow us into the tunnel. He went back to set it off."

"Jack! We're trapped! Trapped here under the ground!"

"No, we aren't. We go down the river the way the others did. Quick! Get into that boat."

Donna had seen no boat, but now she looked where Jack pointed and there it was; a small craft looking somewhat like a rowboat with a tiller fastened aft. The boat was there at their feet, held by a rope to an iron ring in the rock.

"Here," Jack said. "I'll hold it. Get into the front end. Careful."

Numbed—no longer able to respond to shock piled on shock—Donna knelt in the prow of the boat. She scarcely felt the ice-cold water soaking her knees as they pressed against the boards beneath.

"Cast the line off," Jack said.

Donna struggled with the knot, then found that the rope was looped over the iron ring and came away without untying. The boat leaped away from shore. It was swept out into the current of the stream. Donna closed her eyes as it hurtled forward into darkness.

"Here," Jack called. "You take the flare. I've got my hands full with this damn tail-piece. If I don't handle it right we'll slam into a wall."

Donna took the flare and held it high over her head. It showed the river to be somewhat narrower than it had first appeared. Not more than twenty-five feet in width at its widest.

"Keep your ears open," Jack said. "We shouldn't bump into any cataracts, but listen for them anyhow. And let me know if you see a bend up ahead."

Donna had no chance to answer because, at that moment, the entire river and the bed beneath it seemed to lift upward in one vast motion. The water churned around them and the tunnel was full of thunder.

Donna screamed and heard Jack's voice as from far away: "That was it! Hang on, honey! He really blew up the castle that time! Hold tight!"

She clutched the sides of the boat as it rocked around like a leaf in a storm. Then, it steadied away, as the land seemed to settle back into itself. The water rushed onward as before, and Donna realized a great deal of the splashing had been from rock dropping down from above. Miraculously, none of them had hit the boat.

Jack's voice was cheerful; something to cling to in this world of madness. "We're all right, honey. Nothing caved in on us. We're going to make it! Sit tight!"

Jack could not realize how wrong he was. He had, of course, no way of knowing. But the truth came with appalling swiftness. Within five minutes, the chance was in evidence; the flow of the river had lessened, and the boat was moving at a laggard pace.

The waters of the river were fast vanishing.

"Jack! Something's wrong! It's getting shallow. Are we reaching the end?"

"I don't think so, honey. You know what's happened? That explosion split the earth back by the castle somewhere. It gave the river a new outlet! The water doesn't flow this way any more! In ten minutes, at this rate,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

we'll be sitting in a boat on the floor of a dry tunnel."

AND THIS was true. So sharp was the downward pitch of the river that, within minutes, the boat scraped bottom. Only a trickle of water was running past them. The river was gone.

Jack got to his feet, and Donna saw the white-toothed grin on his face; the grin with a gap where one tooth was missing. "It was a nice ride," he said, "but somebody jerked the river from under us. Where do we go from here?"

"I—I guess we walk," Donna said. She tried to smile, but she made poor work of it. Jack came close and took her in his arms. She buried her face in his neck and heard him say: "Lord, honey, but you're wonderful! Maybe there's somebody else I could love a lot more, but right now I can't see how it's possible."

She raised her head. The smile was better now. "We're doing fine, darling. There's nothing to worry about. It's all over now. Can you think of anything else that could possibly happen to us?"

"Not a thing, baby, except we've got a long walk ahead of us. Let's go."

Donna stiffened in his arms. "Wait. Wait, Jack. Back there behind us. A light. Do you see it?"

Jack whirled and peered back in the direction they'd come. "You're right. A flare. Somebody's coming down the tunnel after us."

"It's him!"

"I think so."

The fear was back in her voice. "Let's run, Jack! Jack! Let's hurry. We've got to get away."

He held her close. "It's too late. He knows we're here. He's seen our light. You take the flare on down the tunnel. I'll wait here. I'll come after you when... it's finished."

"Jack! Darling! He'll kill you!"

"I don't think so. Do as I say."

Donna turned and fled away, down the river bed. In her mind was only the dread, the terror of Bruce Hakin. She would run—run—run until she dropped. As far as she could, as long as her strength held out.

Finally, she stopped. Behind her, Hakin's flare was only a yellow spot in the distance. Donna dropped to her knees sobbing; breath tearing from her lungs; her body shaking as from ague.

How long she knelt there she never knew; how long the thoughts pitched through her mind: he's back there with Jack. A madman. A maniac. He's back there in the tunnel, full of everything that makes a wild animal. He's killing Jack back there.

Then came the assurance that brought strength. If Jack dies, I want to die, too.

She went back as she had come. Steadier now. The panic was still there, but also a purpose; an objective. This nightmare had to end somewhere, and this was the time and the place.

THE LIGHT ahead grew larger and the sound of a struggle were in her ears. She came closer. Hakin's flare lay on a rock, its flame half-quenched. It fluttered feebly to reveal two shadows struggling silently in a shallow pool. Donna raised her own flare and it seemed that neither of the men was aware of her presence.

Hakin, his face now stripped of any vestige of sanity, was astride the body of Jack Barron. There was a knife in Hakin's hand, and it was moving downward toward Jack's chest. The strength in Jack's arm was not enough to hold the knife away, and it was moving steadily toward his throat.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But Donna did not see the knife—nor the arms matched in a test of strength nor the shining blade. She saw only Bruce Hakin's blazing eyes, and there her battle was centered. It was with his eyes he had bound her and held her and had her a slave. The hypnotic power had to be destroyed before she could ever again possess her own soul.

She did it with one swift terrible movement. Straight and true, she pushed the bright flare squarely into Bruce Hakin's face. He flung up his arms with a scream of agony and went over backwards. But as he fell prone, the flames were there in his face. Searing away the flesh; eating out forever the eyes that had looked with desire on Donna.

Hakin came to his knees as Donna backed away. She now resembled a witch out of hell, but this he would never know. Garbled animal screams came from his throat. And now the agony made madness complete. He still gripped the knife in his right hand, and that hand was slashing at his tortured face. The blade sank deep again and again. In a foam of blood, he struck for the last time, and the blade sank deep into his throat.

It stayed there as his hand fell away, and he dropped down and bloodied the pool. He did not move again.

Donna dropped down also, beside the battered but still grinning Jack Barron. All her panic—all her fear—were gone. And into her tired body came a new strength. She took Jack's head in her arms and drew it close to her breast. Many words of gratitude and thankfulness were in her throat, on her lips, but she used none of them.

"You look like . . ." she said softly.

He grinned up at her: "You're no beauty queen yourself, baby, but you're all I'll ever want."

THE END

Little Giants

THE SMALLEST known star in the heavens has recently been discovered. Known only as L886-6, this white star is only 2,500 miles across. Its light is so faint that it would take about 60,000 such stars to give as much light as our own sun. Although only about 150 million million miles from our solar system, L886-6 glows so feebly that it is at least 10,000 times too faint to be seen without a telescope. There is only one fainter star known: a dense red dwarf star.

White dwarfs are not noted for their size, high surface temperature, and tremendously high densities. It is estimated that the L886-6 has a density 55,000,000 times that of water. A match box filled with particles of this star would weigh 1,000 tons on Earth. This star, which is so small that it would take 300 like it to form a body as large as our sun, is believed to be about 40 per cent heavier than the sun.

—Joe Kleig

Man Is Boss?

By MILDRED LOW

ACCORDING TO anthropologist Ralph Linton, it's a mistaken belief that in primitive societies man is master and woman is slave. He says that one finds as many dominant women in the so-called patriarchial societies, as in our own civilization.

In some cases, the woman is the recipient of even more respect than we hand out here. Many a woman who has given strong able sons to the community commands a position of influence which even extends outside her own family, and since such societies do not attach the same degree of importance to youth as we do, she is much better off as far as her old-age security is concerned.

It seems that whether it's a patriarchial or a matriarchial society, the stronger personality is boss, sex notwithstanding.

Where did you say that rolling pin was?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mephisto pointed and flames gushed from the floor

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It began when Freddy made a pass at a gal with gorgeous legs and a figure right out of heaven. Then it suddenly became —

A CASE FOR MEPHISTO

By
Frank McGivern

FREDDY DOCKER wore tweeds, a silk shirt and cuff links. His thin blond hair was rumpled to camouflage the spreading baldness. His bulbous features sagged beneath vacant, blinking eyes. All in all, Freddy was something one might find selling candy in a burlesque house or waiting at the exit for one of the girls.

Yet now Freddy was in a small book store frequented by bibliophiles, researchers and plain book lovers. In one hand he held a book. In the other, an umbrella which he was using to signal the clerk. He drummed the umbrella on the counter, unconcerned that the clerk was wrapping a book for another customer. The drumming continued in staccato fashion and fi-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nally Freddy cried:

"Hey you! I've got a book here I want to buy. You interested in selling or not? I can't wait while people loaf around here browsing."

Freddy Docker's voice was impressive in a ghastly manner. If one imagined hungry sheep bleating at noontime; petulant ladies demanding tea; septuagenarian financiers denouncing radicalism; teenage radicals denouncing financiers; all these blended together might approach the piercing whimper of Freddy's voice.

"Be right with you," the clerk muttered, attending to the first customer. Meanwhile Freddy kept tapping the umbrella on the counter and making sucking sounds with his teeth.

Finally, the clerk came over to Freddy, took the book from his hands. It was a good book and the clerk usually forgave anyone who loved good books.

"Ah, Goethe," he said. "An evening of rare pleasure awaits you, sir."

Freddy's coarse falsetto laugh keened through the store. "Right! Especially if this babe I'm giving the book to knows how to say thank you the way I hope she does."

Freddy began to fumble through his pockets for money. Finally he took a checkbook from his inside coat pocket.

"I don't have any cash with me," he said. "You'll have to get along with a check."

The clerk nodded and Freddy placed his checkbook carefully on the counter. That other people were waiting didn't bother him at all. He carefully filled in the balance in the stub section and then as he started to write the check the pen went dry. The clerk sighed and sent to the back of the store for a bottle of ink. Returning he placed it before Freddy. Freddy filled his pen. Then he looked for some scrap paper. He intended to try out the pen and the new ink. But he had a better idea. Opening the book he had purchased, he turned to the flyleaf. Attached to this page was a small thin stripping of onion skin paper which covered the upper quarter of the page. On this he hastily scribbled his name—Frederick E. Docker. Then on the bottom of the page, he wrote, "To Cynthia Cummings—a real book worm".

THEN HE made out the check.

"You'll find there's a balance behind this check that would make a comfortable retirement for a guy like you."

He grinned at the clerk and shouldered his way through the people who were waiting out of the store. Behind him, the clerk who had not been angry in twenty years was shredding the pages of a counter display book.

Freddy affected people that way.

He hailed a cab and gave the driver the address of Cynthia Cummings. Then he told the driver that since most cab drivers didn't know the city very well he would direct him block by block. When he arrived at the address, he didn't tip the driver because he believed that tipping was a great threat to private enterprise.

Cynthia's apartment was a tribute to her flawless taste and an indication of a substantial cash reserve. Her parents had died some years ago and Cynthia, an extremely level-headed girl, had cautiously and successfully invested her rather large inheritance.

She greeted Freddy with noticeable control.

"Good to see you," he said, slapping her on the back. "You're still the best looking babe with money that I've found yet."

Unabashed at her cool reception he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sat down in a comfortable lounge chair. She sat on the sofa across from him and smoothed her skirts around her well-put-together legs.

"You got good legs," he said conversationally. "Funny how women with good legs always hide them."

She said, "I should think on an afternoon like this you'd find a burlesque show ideal entertainment. It would sort of suit you, I believe, Freddy."

He laughed loudly. Then he took the book and tried to throw it across the room and into the book case. He missed of course and the book clattered to the floor.

"There's a little Goethe for you. I heard you say something about him and what a guy he was."

Cynthia picked the book from the floor. "It's nice to know that you have my reading habits at heart," she said evenly. "But I'm not interested in your reaction to anything I do. For a long time now you've taken advantage of the fact that our mothers were friends. I've put up with you because I don't like unpleasantness of any sort. But today I've finally had enought. You're a boorish man with no manners, no friends, and no personality. You know you haven't a friend in the world—and you never will. So please leave."

Freddy got up clumsily from the sofa, "Playing hard to get, eh?" he said, leering rakishly. He tried to put his arms around her. She slapped him and a spot of white blazed in his left cheek. "Well, I like that!" Freddy cried, genuinely angry. He was sure her very vocal contempt for him was all an act. That was the way his mind operated. He grabbed the book from her and strode out in a fine rage....

THE DEVIL was sitting on the sofa in the front room of the apartment when Freddy got home. He had one knee thrown over the side of the sofa. In one hand was a copy of *Newsweek*. In the order a tennis racket. Freddy could tell he was the devil all right. The curved horns and the red tail were a definite give-away. The aquiline features were a burnished scarlet and the wicked slanted eyes flashed brightly. He wore a close-fitting cape of red and his hooves were unmistakably cloven. Freddy stared at him in bewilderment.

"Why, hello there," the devil said, standing. He carefully placed the magazine and tennis racket on the table beside the sofa.

"What goes?" Freddy cried.

The devil smiled with cynical good humor. "You do, my friend," he said.

Freddy ran a finger under his collar. The room seemed oddly warm. "Now see here," he said. "I—" Then he stopped, his reason reasserting itself. He peered shrewdly at the devil. "I get it now," he said. "A practical joke. One of my friends must have put you up to this gag." He laughed hugely, and the devil winced at the inhuman sound. "You poor ham," Freddy said. "Things must be tough in your racket if you have to take jobs like this."

The devil regarded Freddy curiously. "I must say I'm not following you at all," he said.

"And you'd better not try!" Freddy cried, suddenly indignant. He grabbed a poker. "Now clear out of here, you fraud."

The devil seemed upset. He retreated slowly before Freddy's grim advance; then, almost wearily, he made a slight gesture with his right hand.

Instantly flames leaped from both ends of the poker. Freddy yelped in terror. He was holding a two-ended Bunsen burner. He dropped the poker and it smoldered on the rug for a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moment and then went out.

The devil said apologetically, "Hope I didn't burn you, old man."

Freddy's eyes popped wide in horror. "What do you want?" he said hoarsely.

"Now that's a more sensible reaction," the devil said. "First, if you'll excuse me just a moment, I'll get out of these clothes, and into something more comfortable." There was a flash of smoke and fire and from it stepped an immaculate young man in sport's clothes. The young man's features were pleasant, his eyes clear and candid.

"Now that's better," he said. "I see no reason to go about in that Medieval get up, but the boss—" He stopped, glanced about and lowered his voice. "Frankly, the old man is a bit old-fashioned. He likes the cloven-hoof-and-smell-of-brimstone motif."

Freddy's eyes were rounded in amazement. "That's a pretty good trick," he said feebly. "That quick-change, I mean."

"Why, thank you," the devil said drily.

FREDDY FROWNED. "This talk about the boss is over my head. You mean, you *aren't* the devil?"

"There are many of us who work for the master," the young man said equably. "I happened to be in this area doing a little research on a young girl who's fallen madly in love with her tennis instructor. She's a fine young woman, reckless, unconventional, modern. Naturally, she doesn't believe in anything so superstitious as hell and heaven or the devil. She has her instructor's word that such things absolutely do not exist. They're very compatible."

"Who's her instructor?" Freddy asked blankly.

"Why, I am, of course," the devil said with a charming smile. "That's the way we work. However, I was in the vicinity when your case came up, so that was added to my case load."

"My case?"

"This morning you signed a contract with us," the devil said, and now his voice was grave. He walked to the sofa where Freddy had dropped the copy of Faust. Picking it up, he leafed through it casually and then smiled at Freddy. "This story was written by a man named Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. It's a charming tale, you know, and, surprisingly enough, based on fact. Men have sold their souls to the devil since the dawn of time, of course. However, one particular man made an agreement with us that had a rather curious stipulation. This codicil to the original contract stipulated that whoever might sign the codicil in the future would thereby be bound by the original contract."

"Well?" Freddy said sullenly. "Nobody ever accused me of reading that junk, or believing in devils—" He hesitated, swallowing drily.

"Quite so," the devil said, a glint of merriment in his eyes. "However, in the bookshop today you signed that codicil. You remember perhaps, the slip of paper on the flyleaf page?" He extended the book to Freddy. "That is your signature, I think."

Freddy stared at the strip of thin paper. His signature was at the bottom of it; but the paper was blank.

"The agreement is on the other side," the devil said, anticipating his reaction. "That is the codicil of the original contract on which the story of Faust was based."

"Hmmmm," Freddy said. "You mean I've traded my soul to you for a great deal of money and so forth?"

"Well, hardly." The devil looked

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rather apologetic. "The man who signed that agreement wanted twenty-four hours more to live. He was dying, you see, when we got hold of him. In return for the twenty-four hours of life he gave us his soul. However, he was so bitter and cheerless about the whole deal, that he insisted on this codicil with the thought of eventually involving some other—ah—sucker."

"Spiteful character, wasn't he?" Freddy said.

"Quite."

"Hmmm. Then, all I get is twenty-four more, eh?"

"That's the deal."

Freddy's anger returned. "Now look here, I don't want to go with you."

The devil patted Freddy's shoulder almost tenderly. "You see," he said, "It doesn't matter greatly what you want."

IT WAS nearly five o'clock in the afternoon and Mr. Stanton was preparing to leave for home. He had carefully placed his law books where they would look most impressive to tomorrow morning's clients. Then the front door to the office crashed open and in thundered Freddy waving a book.

Mr. Stanton sat down wearily because the Docker account was important.

"Now look, Stanton," Freddy cried, waving a slip of paper at him. "I want to know what kind of a contract it is. Can we beat it and how much will it cost."

Puzzled, Stanton, took the paper and read what was printed on it. Finally he pointed to Freddy's name on the outside.

"This your signature?"

Freddy nodded.

Stanton smiled. "It's undoubtedly a practical joke. But it's well got up. I've seen few such well-written contracts. There's even a clause about signing either side of the paper, I notice. Take that nonsense about the devil out of here, put in good solid business terminology and you have a cast-iron contract. Mind if I make a copy? Like to show it to the bar association."

Freddy had turned purple. "It's no gag," he shouted. "I *saw* the devil. He knows I signed this contract."

Mr. Stanton sood up nervously. But his voice was sharp with determination. "Now see here, Freddy, you're obviously overwrought. I want you to see a friend of mine. Dr. Bellow is an excellent psychiatrist, and I'm sure he will help you."

Freddy gave it a thought. Perhaps Stanton was right. It *must* have been an illusion.

Thanking Mr. Stanton, Freddy hurried off to the office of the pyschiatrist. He was feeling somewhat better now. Obviously, he'd been suffering from some sort of hallucination. The pleasant young man in the sports clothes couldn't have been anything but a figment of his imagination. Yet, Freddy felt an odd sense of loss as he contemplated this fact. He liked the young man, damn it. The young man had treated him civilly and pleasantly and that was more than he had ever got from his friends. Alas, the young man had said something that had touched Freddy's heart. He had said: "I want you!"

And that was the first time *any*body had ever wanted Freddy for anything!

DR. GERHART VONTRAQ had consented to see Freddy Docker only because he owed Mr. Stanton a substantial amount of money for the legal services which had successfully severed him from a fourth wife. The Doctor was a thin, spare man with a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

challenging mustache which would have looked more appropriate on a member of the Foreign Legion.

"Now, Mr. Docker," he said. "*Tell* me about your trouble."

Freddy told him—briefly and bluntly. When he finished, the doctor rose and tilted the Venetian blind to permit just a shade more light into the room. Then he casually lighted a cigarette and stood leaning against the desk.

"Mr. Docker," he began, "Let me assure you first that there is no such thing as a devil. There is no such thing as a habitat for the devil which the superstitious and the ignorant have named Hell. Do you follow me!"

"Of course," Freddy said impatiently. "All I want from you is straight dope about the things I saw this afternoon."

The doctor's voice was unhurried. "I'll guarantee, Mr. Docker, that as you walk out of this office today, you'll feel the first tuggings of reason at the superstition that has crippled your intellect. Until next week, I want you to remember these few facts. You imagined the weird activities of this afternoon."

The Doctor held up his hand as though to ward off a protest. "Perhaps you feel you actually *did* see these things you describe so graphically. May I assure you that you did *not*. You were experiencing a guilt complex derived from the pleasure you took in the rejection of the mother image. Tell me frankly, was your mother a domineering type?"

Freddy could only nod his head dumbly.

"Then, sir," said Doctor Vontraq, "I suggest you admit that what you experienced this afternoon was merely external evidences of preoedipal trauma. *Go* home and think over carefully what I have said. Next week we'll talk it over again."

"I'll certainly give it a thought, Doctor," said Freddy. "And I think maybe you got it straightened out for me."

"Of course I have," Dr. Vontraq said sharply, incisively.

"Right, no, Doc." Freddy waved to the doctor and opened the office door. There lounging in the waiting room, still carrying the tennis racket, was the devil. He grinned at Freddy and prepared to rise.

Freddy still clutched the office door and his shaking hand caused the door handle to rattle like old chains. Freddy stared into the open office. Doctor Vantraq was seated and making notes in a looseleaf folder. Around his head in halo-fashion was a perfect circle of fire.

Freddy closed the door quietly.

BACK IN Freddy's apartment, the devil was quite jaunty.

"We'll have a bit of fun tonight, Docker. Yes, indeed, this part of my field duty I rather enjoy. We'll start at the Blue Flame. I hear they have a very good floor show and creditable food."

He looked at Freddy, who was slowly climbing into the trousers of his evening clothes. Freddy seemed perplexed.

In the cab Freddy sulked. "I'm trying to get something straight in my mind," he said. "Why should I sort of enjoy being around you?"

The devil merely smiled.

"Maybe," Freddy continued, "I don't mind you because you like to be with me. Maybe that's it."

"Perhaps," the devil agreed but he looked at Freddy strangely as they got out of the cab in front of the Blue Flame.

The Blue Flame was a lush night club that catered to a sophisticated

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and jaded clientele. Here the nucleus of a worldly cafe society congregated to seek the pleasures of the establishment. And the pleasures were many and assorted. An excellent band was playing "There's No Tomorrow" as Freddy entered.

The head waiter greeted them with enthusiasm and directed them to a table close to the dance floor. They sat down and Freddy ordered a bottle of beer and a double shot of bourbon. The devil smiled sardonically and asked for something called an Angels Tip. When the waiter had served the drinks, two girls sat down at their table. They were the most beautiful women Freddy had ever seen. One, a stunning blonde, tall and statuesque; the other, an exotic redhead of artistic proportions.

The redhead smiled intimately. "You boys look interesting," she said. She studied them both, all round innocent eyes, wondering as she did which one of them had the bankroll. She made her gamble and picked up Freddy's hand. "There's a look about you that fascinates me," she said.

"Yeah?" Freddy said, entranced.

"Yes." She hesitated, appearing to search for the words she told tired business men at least fifty times a night. "There's a reckless quality about you—a go-to-hell attitude that's almost frightening."

"Ha!" Freddy cried, and his untamed laugh roared about the room. He jabbed the devil sharply in the ribs. The devil, who was having his palm read by the blonde, winced perceptibly.

"What is it?" he said, irritably.

"DID'JA GET that? She tells me I've got a go-to-hell look about me." He screamed in mirth. "Maybe she's right. So let's live a bit, eh, Nick?"

"Nick?" the blonde asked, smiling.

"Yeah, at school they called him Old Nick," Freddy said, almost helpless with laughter. He banged on the table with both hands and bellowed forth his cheer; and people about them turned to stare in dismay at this animated calliope. In the kitchen a cake fell.

Freddy immediately proceeded to get violently and objectionably drunk, and as he did so he became progressively noisier. The devil attempted to edge away from him, but Freddy clutched at him with desperate strength.

"You want me, remember?" he said, anxiously.

"Yes, of course, but—"

Freddy sighed with relief and whacked the devil between the shoulder blades. "Thought you might be walking out on me," he said. "You know you're the first person ever wanted me. S'fact! Never met anybody who wanted me, except you, old pal." The words suggested his previous *mot* and he shouted with amusement. "Old pal, Old Nick!"

"Stop bellowing like a drunken ass!" the devil said sharply. "You're making a spectacle of yourself."

Freddy blinked in hurt surprise. "I always act this way," he said. "Whash a matter with the way I'm acting?"

The redhead had grown weary of Freddy and his stentorian boorishness.

"Excuse me, please," she said, "But—"

"Runing out on us, eh? Fill up with our booze and run off, eh? Fine thing."

"Listen, you twerp," the blonde began; but she didn't finish the sentence because Freddy reached out and casually poured a glass of beer over her head.

"Cool off," he said, and burst into

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a roar of laughter. "Get it!" he said, digging the devil in the ribs. "Cool off! Get it!"

Four men from adjoining tables got to their feet and approached Freddy with rather determined expressions. Freddy, giggling enthusiastically, sprayed them with a bottle of charged water. Chaos reigned and waiters, bouncers, managers converged on Freddy.

"You fool!" the devil said bitterly. He stood and calmly faced the onrushing men. "Please," he said, raising his hands and smiling with easy charm. "My friend is not himself tonight and I must apologize for his outrageous behavior. Perhaps, I can express our mortification in a more material manner by picking up the checks for your evening's entertainment."

The sprayed men looked thoughtful as they computed their dinners and drinks against the damage to their egos. Their respective egos lost; and they retreated to their tables and the bouncer and waiters faded away.

FREDDY was almost tearful with gratitude. He clutched the devil's arm. "Boy, are you a pal!" he said. "We're like Damon and Python almost, ain't we? Real true-blue buddies."

"Don't be absurd," the devil said shortly.

"What do you mean? You want me, don't you?"

"Well, yes," the devil said after a pregnant pause. "I suppose I do. But can't you stop this ridiculous braying? It would make my task much more congenial."

Freddy sighed. "I don't deserve a good guy like you for a buddy," he said, maudlin tears gleaming in his eyes. "You're first rate, and when we get where we're going I'm sticking to you like a mustard plaster."

"No!" the devil said. "That's out, absolutely out."

"I found me a buddy," Freddy said dramatically to his glass of beer. "I ain't never going to let him go."

"Now listen to me, please," the devil said. There was a worried line above his eyes. "We can't help the assignments we get, you know. I didn't *choose* you, old man. If I had my way I'd be after a certain politician in Middle Europe. There's prestige in a bag like that. But with you—" He stopped, shaking his head wearily. "My point is I don't want you hanging around me later on, reminding everyone that *I* got the job of bringing you in."

"Oh," Freddy said sadly. And then, because he could think of nothing to compensate for this sudden loss of his new buddy, he went to the men's room.

Returning, he saw through bleary eyes that the floor show was starting. The first act was on now, a magician assisted by a lovely redhead. The magician was a tall and commanding figure in evening clothes. His name was Shavini. He had a black spade-shaped beard, glittering eyes, and long graceful hands.

After a fanfare, he stepped forward smiling. Silence settled over the room.

"I haf' a trick that may amuse you," he said. "A leetle trick that only I can do. Please watch carefully."

He extended his left hand and a duck appeared suddenly on his palm.

"Ha!" Shavini cried.

The audience murmured appreciatively.

"Bye, bye, leetle duck," Shavini said, and the duck waddled off the ends of his fingers and disappeared into the thin blue air.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another duck appeared instantly and there was a generous spattering of applause.

Suddenly inspiration swept over Freddy. He saw a sure way to win back the genial affection of his buddy, Old Nick.

"Hah!" he shouted derisively at Shavini. "You fraud! You wouldn't make a patch on a real magician's pants."

Shavini wheeled as if he'd been jabbed in the rear with an icepick. "Vat is this?" he cried, glaring at Freddy.

THE AUDIENCE watched interestedly, not sure that this wasn't part of the act.

Freddy strode to his table and patted the devil on the shoulder.

"Here's a *magician* for you!" he said. "This guy'll make a bum out of you."

"Freddy, shut up!" the devil said in a fierce whisper.

Shavini stepped down from the stage and strolled languidly to Freddy's table. He waved a graceful hand at the bouncers who were again drawing a bead on Freddy.

"I shall attend to thees," he said, with an elegant smile. He studied the devil for a moment in silence, his dark eyes glittering hypnotically.

"So you are a magician?" he said softly.

The devil cleared his throat uncomfortably. "You'll have to excuse my friend, since—"

"Damn right he's a magician," Freddy broke in and then winced as the devil kicked him in the shin.

"Thees is all very peculiar," Shavini said, smiling about at the crowd. "We hear 'xtravanant boasting, but we see no magic. I, Shavini, who have invested my life in my art, am called ze fraud! But the man who is to prove that I am ze fraud sits here and looks embarrassed." Shavini shrugged humorously. "Ess very peculiar."

The crowd was beginning to laugh.

"Perhaps I can teach him a lesson," Shavini said. "Maybe I can show him a trick and then he can show me one. You like that. . ." he said, peering down sardonically at the devil.

"Ha!" Freddy cried. "This'll be good." He bent and hissed in the devil's ear. "Show 'em that poker trick. You'll wow 'em."

"You idiot!"

Shavini leaned forward, stretched forth his hand slowly and plucked a canary from the devil's ear.

"Now he will not be hearing the birdies, eh?" he said to the audience.

Again his hand moved and this time a sheaf of banknotes appeared to flow from the devil's mouth. "Ah, a wealthy man!" Shavini said. "I zank you, sir."

Shavini stepped back, bowed mockingly to the devil. "And now, it is your turn to show up ze fraud, Shavini!"

The devil shook his head and said, "No, I'm afraid I can't do anything like that."

There was a concerted boo from the crowd.

"You see what your public thinks of your magic," Shavini said, and turning on his heel strode back to the stage.

"Wait!"

The devil stood, spots of angry color in his cheeks.

Shavini turned. "We are to see something, eh?"

"Yes, you will see something," the devil said in a low voice. "You spent a lifetime learning your art; I spent eternity. You gambled money, I gambled a Kingdom."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He straightened to his full height and stared past one Shavini at vistas that no one present could see or know; and when he spoke his voice echoed the despair and evil of the Universe.

"You gambled a life, while I gamble with a soul. I will show a glimpse of what I bought with my soul."

HE GESTERED casually with his right hand and then sat down and folded his arms.

Immediately a circle of white fire broke out on the ceiling of the room and dense black smoke poured forth from every bottle in the club. The tables began to bounce up and down in a macabre dance, and an enormous crystal chandelier descended from the ceiling and began slowly to circle Shavini's rigid body.

A woman screamed; and the crowd broke for the exits. But glittering swords appeared in the doorways, flames leaping from their tips, and swung back and forth in glittering menacing arcs.

The crowd dropped to their knees in panic as a cold and desolate wind suddenly roared through the room; and mingled with the keening of the wind could be heard the wail of a thousand voices, the cries of the legions of the damned.

But above that spine-chilling noise another sound could be heard, clearly, unmistakably. It was Freddy's mindless laughter.

The devil suddenly gestured again and the smoke and the wind disappeared. Shavini stood stock still on the stage, his face a mask of disbelief and terror.

The devil caught Freddy's arm and steered him with quick determined strides to an exit. The devil was feeling disgusted with himself; and his jaw was set angrily. Why had he been such a foolish show-off? It was his damnable temper. And worse yet, that pride.

Later, in Freddy's apartment, the devil stared moodily at the floor. They sat together on the sofa and Freddy's arm was draped carelessly across the shoulder of the devil.

"Never seen anything like it," he said hoarsely. "You see those fatheads when that fire started getting closer and closer?"

"Freddy," the devil said after a deliberate pause. "I'm going to do something for you that I've never done for anybody else."

"Gosh, Nick," Freddy said loudly. "Guess you've already done things for me that you haven't done for anybody else. And don't think I don't appreciate it. From now on—you just say the word and old Freddy is your man. We'll make quite a team."

"No, we won't," the devil said. "We won't because, I'm going to release you from your contract."

"Oh, no you're not," Freddy said. "Not after all we've been through. You're just fooling your old buddy."

"I'm offering you the chance that thousands of men before you would have given everything to have," the devil said.

"But I never met anyone I liked as much as you," Freddy said plaintively.

"Well, I'm sorry," the devil said. "But the deal is off. I don't like you at all, and I think I can wait for delivery thru the usual channels."

Freddy got up and stood facing the devil. "You forget one thing, friend. I signed a contract. And a contract is binding two ways."

The devil frowned thoughtfully. "Yes, that's true, of course. However, we might make a deal. Isn't there something — or someone — on earth, whom you want quite badly?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FREDDY shook his head. "Nope."

"You're sure?"

"Positive."

"What about Cynthia Wayne?" the devil said, inspecting his nails casually.

Freddy was startled. "You couldn't do it," he blurted.

"Well, I can try, can't I? And if I'm successful, will you agree to cancel our current deal?"

"Well," Freddy hesitated. "I hate to lose a buddy this way. But go ahead and try. Cynthia's got a few tricks that even you couldn't match."

"Very well. Call her and tell her to come over here. Tell her that you love her very much. Tell her too, that you'll try to get over being an obnoxious fathead and that from now on you'll do anything she says."

"She'll just hang up." Freddy said glumly.

"No, she won't. You see, Freddy," he said gently, "I simply can't stand being near you. But that's because you have undoubtedly less personality appeal than anyone I've encountered. You're that way because you've never had a friend. If you do what Cynthia tells you to, you'll learn what love is. In time you may even become bearable. But right now, my people would be disgusted with you. And it would reflect on me. Go use that telephone."

Freddy did as he was told. When Cynthia answered it seemed as though he were a mere outlet for another's voice which spoke deftly and eloquently about love and turning over a bright and shining new leaf.

He hung up and collapsed on the sofa.

"She said she'll be right over. She was beginning to cry."

The devil looked pleased. "Perhaps this will work out all right. But of course I'll have my eyes on you. You know."

Five minutes later Cynthia Wayne appeared. She seemed to be in a trance.

"Oh, Freddy, darling, I'll never be able to explain it. When I talked to you, it was like talking to a different person. A person I—I could love."

The devil stood smiling in the background.

"You'll excuse me, of course," he said to Cynthia, "I was just saying goodbye to Freddy, who is an old friend of mine. Good-bye, Freddy. I don't suppose I'll be seeing you for a long time—maybe thirty years or so."

The devil waved to them and strolled out. He paused for a moment in the corridor listening to Cynthia.

"Oh, darling, it isn't just that I've fallen in love with you this evening. I've always been attracted to you because you needed me and I knew it. Oh, you'll never know how I've prayed for this to happen. Every night, I've prayed that—"

The devil spun on his heels abruptly and strode angrily toward the elevator. Well if that wasn't just like *Him*—always getting into the act.

THE END

READ THE BEST —

READ AMAZING STORIES!

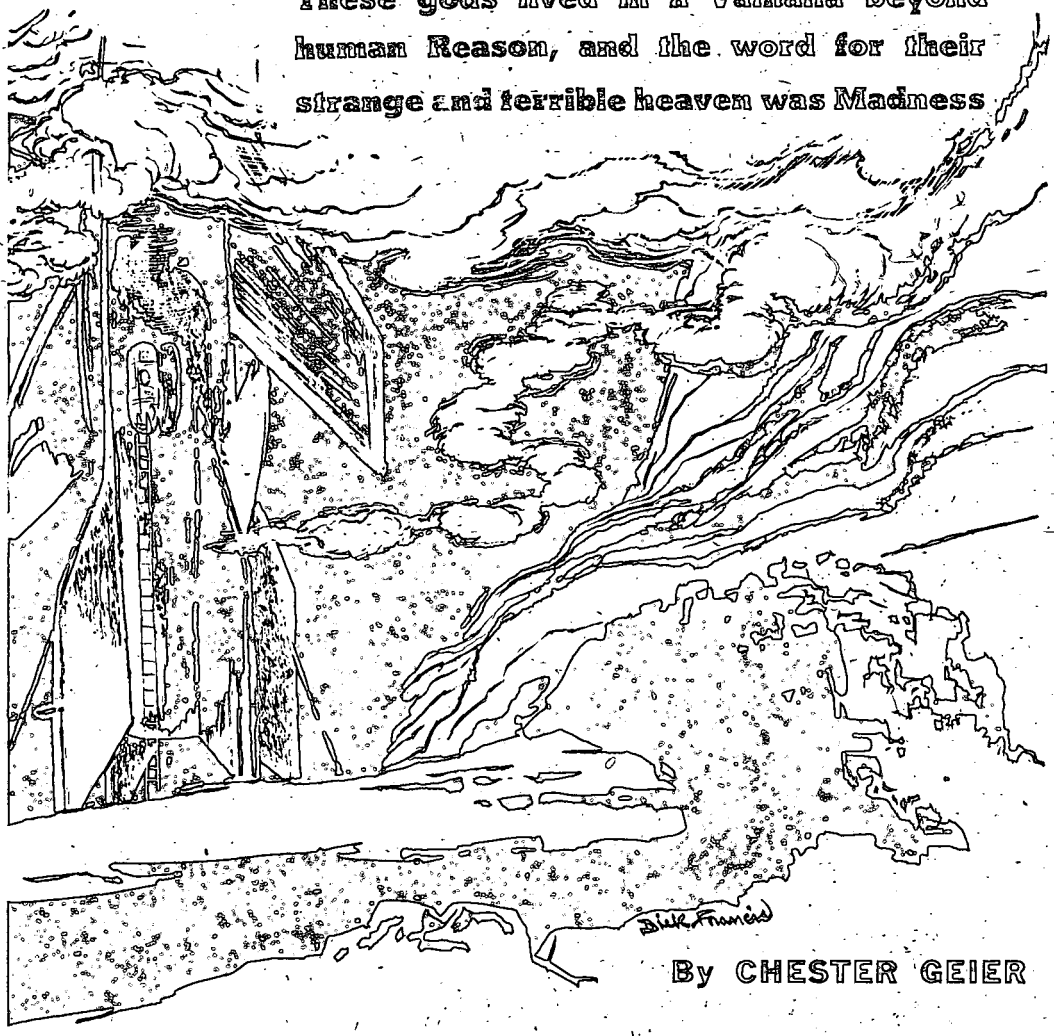
PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A suicidal mania swept over them

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gods of Madness

These gods lived in a Valhalla beyond human Reason, and the word for their strange and terrible heaven was Madness



By CHESTER GEIER

THE STRANGE feeling rushed up in Murray as he neared the entrance to the lounge. He had felt it growing, a vague uneasiness at first, then a more intense warning, until now it was suddenly strong enough to bring him to a dead stop.

He stood there in the corridor of the Galactic Survey hyper-cruiser *Pegasus*, swallowing and rubbing damp palms against the sides of his uniform shorts. The voices of the others, men and women, drifted to him through the open door of the lounge, and he sifted the tones and the occasional intelligible words for an indication that they knew of his blunder.

He was afraid it amounted to just that—a blunder. A blunder that only a green cadet, fresh out of Luna Base,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would have made.

At that, a green cadet might be excused—but not Lieutenant, Alan Murray, astrogator, veteran of a dozen "jumps" through the gray unreality of hyperspace.

And abruptly Murray knew that what he felt was shame. It was going to be difficult to face the others. In the close, intimate life aboard a hyper-cruiser, one developed a keen sensitivity to the thoughts and feelings of one's crewmates. Things slight enough to be ignored in other circumstances became magnified out of proportion. And the mistake he had made, Murray realized, was genuinely serious, affecting as it did the safety of everyone on the ship. There were certain to be unpleasant emotional effects.

Murray already had had Latham's reaction. His ears still burned from the scorn and the barely concealed mockery with which Latham had dismissed him from the bridge. Latham's mockery, he knew, had been prompted by the thought of how Murray's mistake would affect his standing with Iris Carlton. A subtle rivalry—subtle, in view of their differences in rank—existed between the two men over the vivacious blonde meteorologist. Murray had not allowed Latham's status as commander to deter him, and Latham on his own part had no moral or legal right to use that status in his favor where courtship was concerned. Naturally, Murray thought bitterly, Latham welcomed anything that would lower him in Iris Carlton's eyes. And Murray feared that his apparent mistake would do just that.

WHETHER a mistake had actually been made, and just how big, remained to be seen. Latham was at the moment closeted with Jules Bouchard and Marsha Roblett, examining the sun system near which the *Pegasus* had emerged and checking its position among the stars. The hyper-cruiser had been placed in an orbit about the doubtful sun, where it would remain until all available data had been secured.

It seemed incredible to Murray that he could have completely missed the Enderby System. He had carefully followed the hyperdrive coordinates recorded by the Charting Expedition that had discovered the new sun and its family of four planets. And he had carefully checked and rechecked his calculations, knowing that if any particular jump was a mere decimal place or fraction of a second off, the result would be for the ship to end up dozens of light-years from its intended destination, very often in some utterly unknown corner of the galaxy. Numerous hyper-cruisers had disappeared this way, never to be heard from again—lost among the trackless mazes of the stars. It was for this reason that hyperspacial travel was a cautious jumping from reference point to carefully determined reference point. The Charting Expeditions, which plotted these reference points, were the trailblazers of man's advance into the galactic frontier.

Murray fought down his qualms. He'd have to face the music, if it worked out that way. A hyper-cruiser was no place in which to hide one's head like a legendary ostrich.

Taking a deep breath and settling his expression carefully, he strode into the lounge. Most of the ship's dozen-odd passengers were gathered here, sipping lactol drinks or munching sandwiches. Tension was evident in the low-voiced conversation that filled the room. Murray felt it as though it were a chill, clinging fog. The usual laughter and strident argument were missing.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At Murray's appearance a widening ripple of silence spread through the scattered groups. In the growing quiet the clear tenor of psychologist Tony Lorenzo seemed unnaturally loud.

"Ah, here's Alan now! He'll tell us what's going on."

"What's happened, Alan?" Gus Marczek, the squat, black-thatched geologist, demanded. "Why did the old man have the ship put into an orbit? Why don't we land?"

The others remained silent, as though Marczek had adequately voiced their thoughts. Murray felt the impact of their eyes and knew they were awaiting his answer.

He shrugged. "I don't know much more than you do. Latham claims this isn't the Enderby System. He's checking now, with Marsha and Jules. We'll all know soon enough."

"You mean we're lost?" anthropologist Suraya Ramkitra asked breathlessly, her sloe eyes wide.

"Not exactly," Murray returned. "It's possible to backtrack along the hyperdrive coordinates that brought us to this point."

"But if the coordinates happen to be wrong...." Marczek suggested forebodingly.

Murray felt the tension again, thickening. He spread his hands. "All I know is that I followed the official figures—and here we are. Latham will tell us where that is. Don't jump to any conclusions just yet."

SUDDENLY unable to face the worried eyes that were watching him, Murray strode to the automat. He pressed the appropriate buttons for a sandwich and a lactol foamer and glanced around for Iris Carlton. He saw her sitting with Pat Hohmeyer, ecologist, and Bern Thorsen, biochemist. Iris' blue eyes, he noted with a surge of pleasure, were fixed on him, questioning and expectant. He strode over, carrying his wrapped sandwich and the plastic lactol container.

"I heard what you said, Alan," Iris remarked as Murray dropped into the vacant seat beside her. "I hope the situation isn't as serious as Keith seems to think it is."

Murray's pleasure was somewhat dulled by her use of Latham's first name. But Iris' words were otherwise typical of her. She took a genuine interest in people and her sympathy was quick and unstinting. He hoped she felt more than just sympathy where he was concerned.

Women had taken an increasingly important place in almost every field of endeavor, and the spreading thin of human beings throughout the galaxy, requiring the cooperation of every able person, had hastened the process to its ultimate end. Women now worked at the side of men as equals to an extent never before acknowledged. And in galactic space it was inevitable that the time-honored customs and institutions involved in male-female relationships should give way to a more practical attitude.

Partnerships at present were often casual and temporary, but on the other hand there yet remained those who sought something deeper and more lasting, and who for that reason held aloof from transitory unions. Iris Carlton was one of these. It increased her value in Murray's eyes—as he knew it did in Latham's.

"What makes Latham think this isn't the Enderby System?" Thorsen asked in his bass rumble. He was a pale-haired, burly man, with the ice-blue, far-seeking gaze of his Viking ancestors.

"Something about the size and color of the sun out here," Murray said. "Latham's with Jules and Marsha now, checking its spectral type and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the rest of the really vital data."

Pat Hohmeyer said slowly, "If it turns out that this is the wrong system, then whose fault is it?"

Murray's mouth felt suddenly dry. He sipped at his lactol foamer to wash down a bite of sandwich.

"I wish it weren't necessary to talk about whose fault it is or isn't," Iris put in. "The important thing is to correct any mistake that has been made."

Murray was grateful for Iris' attempt to intervene—she seemed to sense that the subject was a touchy one with him—but Thorsen's frown showed an unwillingness to be sidetracked.

"I think Pat's question is a good one," Thorsen said doggedly. "In some situations you have to know who made a mistake and how before you can correct it. This is one of those situations. We've ended up at the wrong sun system. Before we can find the right one, we have to know exactly how we got here. Because hyper-ship jumps are made along a chain of reference points. Slip a couple of links in the chain and you're lost. It's possible to retrace your jumps and get back on the chain, but you have to know the precise factors that took you off to begin with. If you don't, you wind up playing a game of blind man's bluff. And the galaxy's a mighty big place. You have to be damned lucky to hit a sector that's been charted."

PAT HOHMEYER nodded and returned to the attack. "What does Latham think went wrong?" she questioned Murray.

He said evenly, "Latham claims I made a mistake in astrogation. But a mistake on my part is just one of several other possibilities."

There was a momentary silence. It seemed to Murray that Thorsen and Pat were avoiding his eyes, and he had the disturbing conviction that they already had settled on him as an object of blame.

Thorsen said abruptly, "What I'd like to know is whether we can backtrack, if it comes to that. What do you think, Alan?"

"You're assuming an error in astrogation," Murray returned. His apprehension, now that he found himself actually on the defensive, was turning into anger. "There are other possibilities to explain what happened, don't forget that, Bern."

Thorsen coolly met the thrust of Murray's eyes. "Let's assume an error in astrogation, then. Can we backtrack?"

Murray forced calmness into his thoughts, into his voice. "I have a record of my calculations, of course. In theory it should be possible to retrace our jumps to a correct reference point—that is, using your figure of speech, Bern, to get back on the chain again."

"Theory," Thorsen grunted. "What about practice?"

"In practice, since you have no official hyperdrive co-ordinates to calculate from, each error is cumulative. The farther back you have to retrace your jumps, the farther you end up from the chain."

"Don't you have any idea of how far we'd have to backtrack?".

Murray shook his head. "I would not only have to assume an error in astrogation—I'd have to admit it. I'm not going to do that, because I don't think it's the answer. I told you what Latham thinks, Bern, and where I'm concerned Latham is influenced by a certain amount of . . . well, prejudice. I never thought you'd let the same thing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

influence you." Murray was deliberately shifting the attack.

"It's the idea of being lost," Thorsen growled. "A survey expedition always faces a certain amount of danger, of course—things the charting gangs happened to overlook. But it's about a thousand times worse to know there's no way of getting back home."

Pat Hohmeyer shuddered. "It would be horrible to be lost.... never to see civilization again."

"I should think you'd be used to roughing it by now, Pat," Iris remarked.

"Just how much do we ever rough it, really?" the other girl demanded. "We always use the ship as a base, and that gadget"—she indicated the gleaming expanse of the automat—"keeps us fed on the wildest and woolliest planets. And those planets are habitable. What do you suppose would happen to us on a planet that's not? We have only a certain amount of food, air and fuel."

THORSEN nodded. "We don't know a thing about the planets of this sun, here, either. None might be habitable, and most likely we wouldn't have enough supplies to find a planet in some sun system that is. Habitable planets are damned few."

Iris grimaced. "Let's talk about something cheerful for a change. The others are watching us, and we seem positively to be spreading gloom."

But Thorsen and Pat, sharing each other's emotions as they shared a long, loyal partnership, relapsed into worried silence. Murray found himself engaged in a low-voiced conversation with Iris, which though pleasant did not entirely relieve his tension. He kept watching for Latham's appearance, and, presently the commander came striding into the lounge, followed by Jules Bouchard and Marsha Roblett. Everyone grew silent.

It seemed to Murray that the survey crew members immediately stiffened into anxious alertness, but that might have been merely a product of his own reaction. He felt suddenly that he and Latham were the only persons in the room, that what was about to happen concerned them alone.

Latham stopped at the automat and drew a lactol foamer. Then he glanced about him, as if measuring the amount of curiosity in the room and deliberately prolonging it.

There was that flaw in the man, Murray thought. Latham was a capable commander, but he was still young enough to indulge in dramatic gestures. He was a slim, sandy-haired man whose sharply chiseled features held consciousness of the importance of his position.

"I'm afraid I have a rather unpleasant announcement to make," Latham said abruptly. His eyes touched Murray and Iris and swung back to the others, as if he had needed the pause to brace himself for the grim task ahead. "As you all know, our destination was Planet IV of the Enderby System, and we were provided with hyperdrive coordinates which should have enabled us to reach that destination without difficulty. Unfortunately, however, we seem to have ended up near a completely unknown sun system. The Enderby star is listed as Class G in the official reports. The star here is very definitely Class F." Latham sent an inquiring glance at Bouchard, evidently seeking the other's corroboration.

The astrophysicist responded with an earnest nod. "No doubt of it. There are numerous other confirmatory details, such as the size of the sun, the number of planets and satellites in the system, and the pattern of the constellations in this part of the galaxy—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as determined by Marsha, here."

A hush followed that had the bleak quality of people whose worse fears have been realized. Latham sipped at his drink and looked sympathetic.

Pat Hohmeyer, as usual disconcertingly to the point, asked, "What do you think is responsible for this situation, Commander?"

"An error in astrogation, apparently."

The answer, Murray thought with an inward flinching, was made with rather too obvious promptness and relish. Again he felt the eyes of the others on him; and again anger kindled in him, this time at the spite which was motivating Latham to take unfair advantage of what had happened.

He forced his emotions under control and said quietly, "I hope you aren't overlooking the other possibilities, Commander."

LATHAM'S eyebrows rose. "I've considered them, but what do you suggest might be involved?"

"A mistake in the official hyperdrive coordinates that were given to us, for one thing. The figures pass through several departments after they leave the hands of the charting crews, and clerical errors have happened—too often."

Latham shook his head, but managed to give an impression of kindly patience. "That might have been true in the past. Today, however, precautions are taken which make the possibility extremely remote. From charting crews through headquarters, the figures are handled in a way that precludes mistakes."

"Yet you'll have to admit that a margin for error still remains, Commander."

"I hope you aren't going to quibble, Lieutenant Murray." Latham's tone had sharpened, and his patient pose was suddenly no longer in evidence. "You're entitled to a chance to clear your record, of course—but not by splitting hairs."

"I just wanted to establish the fact that the possibility in question *does* exist, slight as it is," Murray pointed out. "But it isn't the only possibility. There's the positronic brain on which I worked out my calculations. The devices are sensitive, and jumps through hyperspace often have queer effects on them, shifting or actually erasing data in the memory cells. Thus you get wrong answers that check perfectly, through a process of rationalization similar to that in the human brain."

Latham smiled slightly, as though to indicate that his ground remained unshaken. "That's true enough—but precautions have been taken even there. I understand that the positronic brain is monitored to register a warning after each jump if any change takes place in its memory cells."

Murray was in his own field now, equally certain of his ground. "Any *detectible* change, yes. But the monitoring still takes place on a mechanical level, and a change can be so slight that it doesn't register, except cumulatively. Just as in human beings, where aberration is evident in a pattern of actions rather than in individual actions."

"You may be right in this instance," Latham admitted reluctantly. "But I don't regard it as conclusive. The possibility would take quite some time to investigate, and even then I'd more or less have to take your word for the result."

"There's still another possibility," Murray went on, driving his final argument home. "This involves the intensity of the hyperdrive field. If the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intensity varies ever so slightly from a certain critical strength, a destination will be missed. Just like a man told to take ten steps to a certain point. Each step has to be of a precise length. If they are slightly too long, or slightly too short, the man does not reach the exact point."

Latham looked startled for an instant, then as though to mask his reaction swung around to Hal Warner. "Anything in this, Hal?"

The lanky hyperphysicist ran a hand through his bristling thatch in sudden agitation and nodded slowly. "It's possible—in fact, it may be the answer. But, checking would involve taking the generators apart! The job would take weeks...headquarters time, I mean."

"Yet you're willing to consider the idea seriously?" Latham was frowning.

"More seriously than I'd like to admit," Warner returned. "Actually, you see, the hyperdrive field strength is variable—just as a man may take short or long steps. So to avoid confusion the strength is placed on an arbitrary standard. But getting individual hyperdrive generators to operate according to this standard is the devil's own job. There are often microscopic differences in adjustment, and over the enormous distances represented by each jump, these result in serious deviations from the norm. Point is, you don't know the differences are there until the deviations stare you in the face. It takes actual operating conditions to show them up."

LATHAM'S frown had deepened. "If the possibility actually does exist, it means we won't be able to use the hyperdrive until the generators have been checked. And that means a long period of delay and inactivity. Headquarters isn't going to like that one single bit. Each survey crew has a definite schedule to maintain, and if so much as one falls behind it's likely to throw the whole program into confusion."

Latham fastened angry eyes on Murray. "I admit, Lieutenant Murray, that the question you've raised requires investigation. But at the same time I'm not overlooking the possibility that you're trying to provide yourself with an alibi. If it develops that such is the case, then you're going to find yourself involved in something a great deal more serious than a blot on your record. For irresponsible behavior and false statements directly hampering the assigned duties of this expedition and indirectly endangering its members, you will be liable to dismissal from the service."

Latham paused to let that sink in. His expression subtly changed. "It would be in your own best interests to consider this matter carefully, Lieutenant. Why not admit you've made a mistake? By doing so you will protect yourself from more severe penalties."

Indignation rose in Murray as he saw the trap that had been set for him. Latham was trying to maneuver him into a public admission of guilt—no doubt staged largely for Iris' benefit.

He shook his head doggedly. "I can't admit having made a mistake, because to the best of my knowledge I didn't make one. I carefully checked my calculations every step of the way, and I'm convinced that something else entirely is responsible for what has happened."

"Very well, Lieutenant," Latham returned coldly. "You leave me no alternative than to conduct an investigation which will mean inconvenience and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loss of valuable time for all of us. And when the evidence finally is in, you may be sure that your lack of honesty and of consideration for your crewmates will be remembered."

Murray struggled to keep his mounting resentment under control. Latham deliberately was emphasizing his own belief in Murray's guilt, aware of the extent to which his authority as commander would influence the others. That the others were influenced was evident in the stares of doubt and outright accusation Murray saw directed at him.

The silence was broken by Warner's voice. He spoke musingly, as if he had been lost in thought.

"I think we could save quite a bit of time if it were possible to land the ship somewhere. That would make the work on the generators easier and quicker."

"But where could we land?" Latham protested. "We know nothing at all about this sun system."

"I believe the second planet might be a habitable one, Commander," Marsha Roblett suddenly put in. She was a dark, intense girl whose infatuation for Latham was obvious to all except the man himself. "While examining this system through the electron telescope, I happened to notice that the second planet contains evidence of an atmosphere. There were distinct signs of clouds and vegetation."

"That's it!" Warner said in excitement. "That's just what we need."

Latham hesitated. "I don't like the idea of landing on a completely unknown planet, but it would save time in making an investigation. And of course we could determine if any dangers are present and take precautions against them." He nodded with sudden decision. "Very well. We'll look over this planet of yours, Marsha, and see how suitable it is. To stations, everyone!"

The expedition members also doubled in brass as the ship's crew. As they rose and began leaving the lounge, Murray turned to Iris for a hurried last few words.

"I'm sorry about this unpleasantness, Iris. It's a matter of principle and . . . and something else. I hate putting you and the others in the middle, but I've got to see this thing through."

SHE NODDED slowly. "I think I understand, Alan. Good luck."

Murray took his post beside Latham on the bridge, and on its contragrav auxiliary propulsion unit, the *Pegasus* moved smoothly out of its orbit and swung in a huge parabola toward the second planet of the unknown F type sun. The planet grew in size and detail, and shortly the hyper-cruiser was settling with feather-like ease through its atmospheric envelope.

Latham, handling the controls, was icily silent. Murray concentrated on the magnified details shown on the scanning screen before him. The planet appeared to be a pleasant one. Its continents were small but numerous, a fascinating, everchanging patchwork of green forests and fields, threaded together by hill ranges and rivers.

No artificial constructions were visible anywhere, no cities or villages, no outward signs of intelligent life. As though encouraged by this fact, Latham brought the *Pegasus* close to the surface and switched on the autopilot.

Murray watched the scanning screen. He knew that the others aboard the ship were busy with instruments of their own: testing the atmospheric content and pressure; test-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing for dangerous radiation and bacteria; recording temperature and gravity. Tasks as routine as they were important—more than one lovely, inviting world had in the past proved a death-trap.

The reports, when all finally were in, were satisfactory. The planet was ninety-seven percent Earth-standard—optimum-habitable, according to Galactic Survey Crew terminology—and offered none of the obvious, routine dangers.

"We'll land at once, then," Latham announced via the intercom.

The site chosen was a large, oval valley on one of the more attractive continents, situated at a latitude which promised an even, temperate climate. The valley was cupped within sheer rock walls, with a small lake roughly in the center of its verdant floor that was like a drop of blue liquid in a giant's bowl.

Murray was among the first to leave the ship. As he climbed down from the airlock, he felt a cool breeze touch him with exploring fingers, as though aware of his strangeness. The air had a crisp, earthy smell. Breathing it in deeply, Murray stood in lush, knee-high grass, glancing around him.

Tranquility breathed from the scene. The sky was a clear blue-green, lightly strewn with puffs of white cloud. The vivid hue of the grass found an echo in the vivid foliage of the tall, slender trees which seemed to send a rustling murmur of welcome through the fragrant air.

Familiar sounds and scents; familiar colors. Murray had a sudden feeling of nostalgia, as though he gazed at some well-remembered corner of Earth itself. He looked around for Iris, wondering if she had been struck by the same impression. He saw her standing with Latham, smiling at some remark the man had made, and the moment of enchantment was abruptly gone.

The voice of one of the women rose in shrill excitement. Murray saw that biologist Dolores Sanchez was pointing toward a portion of the valley wall, opposite the cruiser's position near the lake.

"I saw something move over there!" she said. "Looked like birds."

PEERING in the indicated direction, Murray saw that tiny distant shapes actually were moving against the rock wall. They seemed to be soaring effortlessly through the air, but he could find nothing bird-like about their movements.

"Binoculars, someone!" Latham demanded sharply.

Gus Marczek relinquished his, and Latham peered for a long moment, his body rigid. Finally he turned.

"They're creatures of some sort, all right—but not winged. And they're coming this way, fast. We'd better not take any chances. Get into the ship, everyone. Ready the guns and stand by."

Murray took up his own particular post at one of the gun mounts on the bridge. He watched the cross-haired target screen and waited for developments.

The mysterious floating creatures were not visible from his position for some minutes. Then two of them moved slowly into sight within the screen, apparently making a curious examination of this gleaming monster that had so suddenly invaded their domain.

Murray had seen strange forms of alien life on numerous other worlds, yet these creatures somehow had the capacity to startle him. They looked oddly like weather balloons—or aerial octopi. Their bodies seemed to consist mainly of a pinkish-gray sphere,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some five feet in diameter, attached to the undersurface of which was a barrel-shaped mass—a trunk, or a head, or something that combined the features of both. From this projected six long tentacles or arms.

The trunk contained a number of exterior organs, but for the most part Murray could not decide what these were. There was a large, thick, snout-like member that evidently served the function of a nose; and on stalks radiating at equal intervals around the middle of the trunk were three globular, lidded organs that clearly were eyes. These swayed and twisted about, lids blinking over the staring pupils, in obvious excitement.

There was no indication that the creatures represented civilized life, or even a high order of intelligent life. They wore no clothing or ornaments, their tentacles held no weapons or other artifacts.

As Murray watched the screen, others of the creatures appeared, rising and descending with a smooth agility or darting past with sudden bursts of speed. They moved, he realized, by expelling blasts of air through the snout-like organ in the fashion of a jet exhaust.

The creatures gave no appearance of anything more than curiosity. Nothing in their movements might have been interpreted as hostile or menacing.

Murray heard Latham speak into the ship's intercom.

"The things out there look harmless enough. Most probably they're nothing more than this planet's equivalent of cattle, or the like. We'll go outside for a closer look at them—but naturally certain precautions will be observed. Only a small armed group will go. The rest will remain beside their weapons in case of an emergency."

Latham named anthropologist Suraya Ramkitra, psychologist Tony Lorenzo, and Murray as those to accompany him.

"The only reason I'm taking *you* along," Latham told Murray, "is that you're expendable. The fact that you have fast reactions is a minor consideration—but I'm completely in doubt regarding your other abilities."

MURRAY felt warmth surge into his face. But he held back his anger, considering his words carefully, to avoid giving Latham the satisfaction of inciting him into remarks which could be interpreted as insubordinate.

He said quietly, "I believe, Commander, that it's customary to consider a man innocent of guilt until evidence has proved otherwise. The evidence in my case is still missing—yet it would seem you've already reached a verdict."

Latham's sharp features hardened. "I speak from experience, Murray. I wouldn't be commander of this expedition if I didn't have the ability to put my finger on trouble without going through a lot of formalities. You were just clever enough to put my good judgment in doubt with the others, and ethics requires that I play along with you—but when the facts finally prove you actually were wrong, you're going to regret your rashness."

"The facts haven't been established yet," Murray said doggedly. "Until they are, I'm entitled to a certain amount of courtesy and consideration. And until the facts are in, it's open to question whether your conclusions are the result of good judgment or personal spite."

Latham's eyes were suddenly dangerous. "Watch your step, Murray! I've given you plenty of leeway in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this matter, but you can go too far."

Looking into the other's baleful gaze, Murray had the swift, fantastic impression that death threatened him. He knew that men who carried out important duties of galactic scope were trained against glandular influences in their reactions. But some emotions were too primal and basic to be kept under effective control. And Murray sensed that Latham was dominated by certain feelings in connection with Iris that amounted to serious aberration.

No—murder wasn't quite such a fantastic possibility.

Advanced training and education couldn't entirely prevent men from being victims of their impulses. The shortcoming was one for evolution itself to remove.

Murder was still committed—though more cleverly, with more emphasis on patience and method. And Murray knew that murder on an unsetteled planet was the easiest of all. Accidents happened. Men often disappeared without trace. It was accepted as an occupational hazard.

Latham, as though having sensed Murray's thoughts, abruptly turned away, his face mask-like. Murray followed with a strange new wariness.

Latham was the first to emerge from the airlock and into full view of the balloon creatures hovering outside. Murray was next, his hand resting alertly on the blast-shell pistol at his hip. After him came Suraya and Lorenzo.

AT THE appearance of the humans the floating shapes retreated with startled haste. They hung at a wary distance from the cruiser, their stalked eyes fixed in a rigid stare upon the figures below the airlock. For a long, tense moment each group regarded the other amid a complete absence of sound or motion. Then slowly one of the balloon creatures began creeping forward, a gentle, almost languid drifting, as though it were being borne on a faint, lazy current.

Murray's fingers tightened on the butt of his gun. He heard Latham's warning whisper and sensed the abrupt tension that had flashed into Suraya and Lorenzo. The approaching monstrosity gave no hint of threat, no indication of the manner in which it might prove dangerous. With the exception of its tentacles, it bore no deadly offensive equipment, no horns, claws, or tearing beak. Yet it seemed to Murray that there was an insidious, hidden menace about the drifting shape.

Closer the creature came, and closer. There was no change in its slow, creeping progress. Its tentacles hung relaxed, and its stalked eyes remained fixed in their curious stare.

This particular specimen, Murray noticed, was larger than the others, its tentacles longer and thicker, and its spherical over-body a darker hue than that of its companions. It seemed to exude an aura of authority, of command. The leader of the balloon creatures, perhaps, Murray thought.

Still closer came the languidly drifting shape. Presently only a few meters separated it from the group beneath the airlock.

Murray heard Suraya release a thin, stiffled sound that might have been a sob. His own nerves were jerking with tension.

Latham was the foremost of the group, and Murray realized it was upon him that the attention of the balloon creature was centered. A sly thought stole past the censors that training had installed in his mind. If the creature intended harm to Latham,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he could delay killing it just long enough not to interfere with Latham's death. That would remove Latham and the man's hostility and threats. A moment's hesitation—and it would be over. Murray knew he was faster with a gun than either Suraya or Lorenzo, fast enough so that he could delay and still fire an instant before either triggered his own weapon. The delay would thus go unnoticed. No faintest taint of blame could afterward be attached to him.

The balloon creature was now perilously close. Its creeping progress ceased. It floated in the air several feet from Latham, its stalked eyes on a level with the man's.

In spite of himself, Murray had to admire Latham's steely self-control. A lesser man would have fled or opened fire in sheer panic.

And suddenly Murray's training and decent instincts asserted themselves. Latham, after all, was more than just a rival where Iris was concerned. Latham was a human being and important to the welfare of the expedition. He had his shortcomings, but Murray realized these could hardly have been great enough to allow even more serious shortcomings in himself.

HE WAS shocked and chilled by the malevolent glandular influence that had momentarily overpowered him. Training and culture were little more than a flimsy tightrope over a yawning abyss of emotion. It was so incredibly easy for a man to slip.

Again there was an interval of complete motionlessness. Both Latham and the floating alien seemed to be hesitating, as though each sought some crucial sign of friendship or hostility from the other.

Murray discovered that a heavy, musky odor exuded from the balloon creature. The skin of its barrel-shaped underbody appeared thicker than that of the sphere immediately above, leathery and wrinkled in texture. The underside of this was covered with tawny hair, looking like a beard on some huge, misshapen face.

In another moment, with a motion as slow and gentle as its approach, something emerged from the creature's beard, uncoiling and lengthening as it came, a thin, whip-like organ that ended in a profusion of fleshy, hair-fine growths. With this the creature reached delicately toward Latham.

Latham stood frozen, slightly crouched, knuckles white against the gun at his side. His sharp features glistened in the hard sunlight.

Murray was scarcely breathing. Anything could happen in the next instant. Anything at all. His fingers were aching bone on moist gunmetal.

Draw!—his primal impulses told him. Don't wait! Kill! Kill in a mindless orgy of fear and revulsion! For here was the strange, the unknown. Here was terror out of man's ignorant, unreasoning past. Therefore kill!

The end of the whip-like organ or antenna gingerly touched Latham's forehead. Latham seemed to twitch spasmodically at the contact, and a faint gasp broke from his lips. Then he became transfixed and rigid, a man turned suddenly to stone.

Murray's gun was half drawn. A wild hesitation filled him. His every instinct was to fire, to destroy this floating monster that even now, in some incredible fashion, might be sucking the life from Latham's body. But solid training was a foundation for cold reason. He could see no evidence that harm was being done. And to kill one of the balloon creatures without just cause would have retributive effects upon its companions which

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would seriously hamper the work of the survey crew.

Latham remained unmoving, as did the antenna touching him. A long, frozen moment passed. The situation seemed queerly unreal to Murray, dreamlike and nightmarish. He flashed a glance at Suraya and Lorenzo, and saw in their anxious, perplexed eyes the same hesitation that gripped him.

Then Latham straightened. His eyes seemed oddly glazed. "Why...why, it's incredible!" he muttered dreamily. "These creatures are like...like gods!"

The antenna remained on Latham's forehead. For some unfathomable reason that disturbed Murray.

"They...they're telepathic," Latham went on dreamily. "At least through contact with their *girra* organ. They call themselves the Gods of Madness. They're intelligent...wonderfully intelligent. And they're curious about us. They...they mean no harm."

LATHAM'S glazed eyes touched Murray. "The others...we must tell them. It's safe for them to come outside."

Latham raised one hand to speak into the ring radio he had slipped on his finger before leaving the ship.

"Wait!" Murray burst out. "There's something funny about this. Are you all right? Are you sure this isn't a trick of some kind?"

"Of course not!" Latham returned sharply. "These beings are god-like! Do you understand? God-like!"

Murray indicated the whip-like antenna touching Latham's forehead. "Why is it keeping that thing on you?"

"The *girra* makes possible telepathic communication," Latham said. "I've already learned a lot about these people. There's nothing to be afraid of.... See for yourself. Let Strong-Thought touch you with his *girra*."

Murray stiffened. He knew very suddenly that he didn't want the antenna to touch him. His fingers tightened on his gun. He was starting to draw it, when Latham, stepping back, jarred against him. Murray's arm was momentarily imprisoned against his side, and before he could jerk it free, the floating monster's antenna flicked out—touched his forehead.

THE WORLD of Lieutenant Murray changed as he himself changed—instantly. Strange how, for the first time, he knew himself as he really was; how he became fully aware of the mental laziness which had been a part of him all his life. A mistake in navigation? Certainly he'd made a mistake—a bad one—and, deep in his mind, he'd known it all along.

Now, some new force had entered his mind to tear away the mists and confusions which had blinded him for so long. And he was sickeningly aware of the boredom and monotonies of precise mathematics. Plot an astral course? Never again. The very thought made him slightly ill. Desperately, he tried to defend himself before the impersonal entity probing his brain—a bodiless force with no human traits save intelligence.

And at the same time, Latham was also undergoing a soul-searching. A wave of chaos swept through his brain, but in spite of the whirling and the plunging, he knew. He *knew*. If he could get this ship back to its starting point—and he would be able to do it only through sheer luck—he would resign. He was not, and never had been, capable of handling such a command. Murray had made a grave error—certainly—but Latham had been glad. That, in itself, disqualified him

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as a commander. Glad for what reason? Because Murray's error caused him to reflect badly in the eyes of Iris Carlton.

Latham shuddered at the thought—lives placed in jeopardy because of one man's biological urge.

"I bobbled it," Murray said quietly. "It was sheer stupidity coupled with the fact that I don't like mathematics and was never very good with figures in the first place."

"I know," Latham answered, just as quietly, "but my shortcomings are far worse. A commander should be able to view things impersonally. I have not been able to do that, therefore I should not be in command."

"What's happened?" Murray asked. "Who—or what—did this to us?"

"Isn't it obvious?" Latham answered. "These—these bodiless entities. We must destroy them."

A peculiar feeling passed through Murray—a strange mixture of questions. Why had Latham suggested killing the entities? Yet it seemed, even to Murray, like a good idea. He was envious of Latham for suggesting it. Murray passed a hand over his forehead. Odd. He had the feelings of a child—the certainty that he was acting and thinking as a child in an adult body. And that the entities were aware—even amused by this. Kill them—yes, for survival—an instinctive knowledge that only in killing them lay survival.

And he knew the entities were amused. Knew this because, as the thought of how to kill them came to his mind, the answer was furnished—furnished by the entities themselves.

You have a weapon to which we are vulnerable. The flourine gas in your storage tanks—the tanks—the spray guns. We would die instantly.

And Murray found himself questioning the strange creatures mentally. The answers came instantly.

"You have no defense against the gas?"

No weapons—no tangible defense. None, other than you yourselves.

"That doesn't make sense. If we decided to kill you we would certainly not defend you at the same time."

Of course you would.

"Buy why should we kill you? Are you dangerous to us?"

Very dangerous.

There was hidden laughter behind the thought—sinister laughter.

"Dangerous in what way?"

We would make slaves of you.

"You are strange creatures. You commit suicide by telling us how to destroy you."

No. We told you of the weapon which would destroy us.

"The same thing."

No.

Murray realized that Latham was also tuned in on the strange conversation. Their eyes locked. The knowledge of what they had to do for survival hit them at the same instant. Wordless, they moved toward the ship. They entered it and returned soon with the vicious gas weapons.

The shots had come to their ears in the passageway and now they saw the rest of the crew. All dead—all cut down by their own hands in a frenzy of suicide.

As Murray died, he heard the soft laughter of the strange gods. The words of the gods.

They would have made poor slaves. Too arrogant. Too engrossed in the illusion of their own power.

Now death lay over the place. Death and the Gods of Madness, laughing quietly.

THE END

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BULLETS WITH BRAINS

By OMAR BOOTH

THE THUNDEROUS roar of the rocket exhaust fills the night air with horror. It jets in toward the city which is its target, the armed atomic bomb in its nose, waiting like a malignant cancer, to destroy its intended victim. The frantic radar crews on the ground catch the incredibly fast-moving blip on their screens and automatic guided missile-launchers swing into action, ejecting their tracer projectile rockets at even greater velocities. But they fire in almost a random pattern; the enemy is moving so fast. One missile arcs close to the path of the enemy rocket—it doesn't touch it—yet there is a flare as the missile detonates—followed an instant later by an overwhelming blast as the rocket vanishes, its deadly cargo prematurely exploded!...

That sets the pattern for future warfare. Projectiles destroy other projectiles without ever touching them, simply because of the miracle of the proximity fuse. Right now, all over the country factories are turning out incredibly strong miniature glass vacuum tubes which constitute the heart of the proximity fuse. These tubes are the components of small radio transceivers built into shells and rockets. They broadcast a radio wave, which, when reflected by the target fifty feet more or less away, comes back as a blip or pulse which explodes the guided missile or shell. In effect the radius of action of the shell is multiplied a thousand times. It is as if a shell were flying through the air a hundred feet in diameter!

The Second World War saw the introduction of the proximity fuse; the next war will see its use on a grand scale. Put enough shells or rockets carrying proximity fuses in the air and nothing at all can get through that screen. It is a marvel of modern science that radio transceivers can be built small enough to fit into a few cubic inches of space. Then to think that these sets can withstand the tremendous stresses incurred in the heart of an artillery piece!

The hearing aid was the genesis of the proximity fuse, for miniature tubes were originally developed for that peace-time purpose. Their conversion to war followed automatically. Hundreds of millions of tubes like that are being made now, intended for shells and rockets. Little pieces of glass an inch long and a quarter of an inch in diameter, they, in a way, contain the future of the country. The rocket-hunting guided missile, its nose armed with a proximity fuse, is the only hope for knocking out an enemy bomber or rocket carrying atomic bombs destined for our cities!

PLANET

Made to Order

FROM ALL that astronomy has been able to tell us, the Solar System appears to be a pretty crummy place—with the exception of Earth! In fact, the opponents of space travel go out of their way to point out that nowhere in the System is there any world or satellite on which conditions similar to Earth's can be found. This, they reason, is sufficient cause not to bother putting rockets into space.

There's a certain amount of truth in that idea, at that. Mercury is hopelessly hot and barren. Venus is an unknown quantity, but hardly likely to be an oxygen-loaded planet. Mars is cold, with little air and lots of sand. And so on through the System. Perhaps the satellites of Saturn and Jupiter may have something to offer, but this isn't particularly likely, and besides, the possibility of attaining them is so remote. All in all the picture looks bleak. When men build on other planets and other satellites, they'll do so under air-domes. That's where technology leaves now.

But there is a more sanguine group of thinkers who suggest that those who worry about colonizing the planets really aren't weighing the fact that technology is advancing at a furious rate—and that some day *Man will mold his environment to suit himself!*

The hopeful ones see a time when Man has penetrated into space and landed and established colonies on Venus and Mars. By then engineering, they say, will have become so potent, that it will be able to make worlds! This fantastic thought is more reasonable than it at first sounds. The basic premise is that nuclear engineering and atomic physics will give men inexhaustible amounts of power and, with that power, no engineering feat is too odd to be feasible.

For example, some think that providing Mars with an atmosphere is purely a matter of somehow separating the combined oxygen—inexhaustible amounts—of the sand. A tremendous barrier lies between this idea and its application but it is by no means unsound. Others have suggested that Mars be given an auxiliary Sun by turning one of its satellites, Phobos or Deimos, into an atomic furnace!

Similarly, ideas have been advanced for "engineering" the worlds of Venus and of the outer planetary satellites. Insuperable obstacles exist for such things right now, but who is to say that they won't be reduced to trivia in another two or three or four decades? —*E. Bruce Yaches*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They sent Morgan to Mars as a salesman for the Uxtra Company. But it was a fake. Only the Martians' undying hatred was a reality

THE RIM OF FAITH

By E. K. Jarvis

CHAPTER I

THE SPACE-PORT at New York was fog-bound and swept with gusts of sleety gray rain. It was night and the arc lights bordering the field revealed the hazy outlines of great ships, hulls wet and shining, loading for all points in the system.

The lieutenant who had escorted me from Venus cursed the weather eloquently as we came down the ramp toward Customs. We had arrived in Earth's atmosphere almost two hours before but weather had delayed our mooring.

The lieutenant cursed about that, too. He did it with a fluency that is often typical of the very young or the very old. He was very young.

"Customs has been notified," he said in a somewhat mollified voice. "At least we won't be held up there."

"Whee!" I said cheerfully.

That annoyed him. He considered

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They ran — with peril ahead and death behind

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my attitude flippant and inappropriate to the serious nature of our business. He was a dedicated young man, attached to the space-arm, and his present job—escorting me from Venus to that Holy of Holies, the Planetary office of the Space Federation—struck him as very hush-hush and impressive. We had top-flight priorities, special Customs clearances, and were obviously part of something important. And the lieutenant was being properly tense and grim-jawed about it, and he'd obviously have been happier if I'd acted the same way.

But I couldn't. First I was about fifteen years older than the lieutenant, and the trappings and forms of official business left me rather cold. Secondly I didn't know what the Planetary office had in mind for me, and I saw no reason to be concerned until I found out. The Planetary office was important, of course, but like any other organization that employed human beings, it had its quota of stuffed shirts, crackpots and general incompetents. The thing they wanted me for might be big—but there was also the possibility that it was the brainstorm of some stone-headed young idiot.

We cleared Customs and caught a taxi-plane that dropped us before the imposing portals of the Federation buildings. Inside I gave my name—Ashley Morgan—to a page who grabbed it and hurried off like a dog with a bone. The lieutenant's job was over and after a wistful, reluctant glance about the large impressive lobby, he wished me the best and left.

The page picked me up a few minutes later and we rode two elevators and walked along half a mile of corridors before reaching our destination: the office of Basil McGill, a top assistant to a very big man, the one in fact who handled the Federation's negotiations with Mars.

I felt a pleasant tingle of curiosity. This might be the real thing after all. Basil McGill was a shrewd tough man and if he needed help the job was bound to be interesting.

There was no waiting. My name got a secretary out of his chair with a dignified scramble, and he popped in and out of McGill's office like a cuckoo in a clock.

"Go right in, please, Mr. Morgan," he said.

BASIL McGILL, a tall, impeccably dressed man of middle years, with a very correct, very Foreign Office manner, came from behind his desk and shook hands with me politely. I had known him before, on a few other jobs, and while I suspected he might have a heart beneath his crusty exterior, I wouldn't have bet on it. Despite his good manners he could be as ruthless as Torquemada's chief torturer.

We exchanged banalities and lit cigarettes. I took a chair that gave me a grand view of the soaring sweep of the city's skyline, and Basil sat on the edge of his desk. He smiled down at me and asked about my trip. I told him it was uneventful.

"Well," he said, "the Chief suggested I use you for this job, Ashley. He was—quite impressed with your last work for us."

"Glad to hear it," I said, and smiled. "The check was nice, too."

"I'm sure it was," he said. He paused, studying the tip of his cigarette. Then he said: "I didn't want to use you, but the Chief insisted. We might as well be honest with each other. I have a small opinion of a man who will do anything for money, Ashley."

I laughed. "You have a small grasp of the realities of life, Basil. But let's not go into that. You need a man for a certain job, which, I can tell you in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

advance, is of such a type that you won't entrust it to the regular staff here. You're giving it to me, whether you'll admit it or not, because a man who works for money is frequently more reliable than one who works for loyalty and principle." I leaned back, enjoying the annoyed frown on Basil's face. "If I didn't do a good job the news would spread and I'd find myself working for peanuts, or not at a'l. If a young career diplomat messes things up you just send him off to Jupiter, or some equally stable place, to get his ears dried."

"Yes, that's true enough," Basil said drily. "But the young career diplomat isn't likely to sell out to someone who puts up more money for his services."

"That hasn't happened with me yet, has it?" I said.

"It's a possibility, you must admit."

"Not if you pay me so much that the opposition gets a coronary attack at the thought of topping it," I said, smiling. "Now let's hear what you've got."

"Very well. The Federation finds it necessary to deliver certain papers to Zatoll. You know about him, I presume?"

I thought a moment and nodded. Zatoll was a shadowy figure, the leader of the guerilla forces on Mars. He was not doing too well in his revolt against the incumbent government. I knew. That wasn't surprising. The present government of Mars was tough, realistic and successful. It had a fine contempt for individual rights, a mighty yen for power and pelf, and a charming lack of ethics. Also, because the Martian ruling clique had imperialistic notions, it didn't take too shrewd a guess on my part to realize that the Federation wanted to help Zatoll, and the guerilla cause, but not openly. It was the old game of diplomacy and politics at its delightful, unsavory best. I knew it well.

I said, "No point in asking what's in the papers, I suppose?"

"No, you'll be safer not knowing. Now, according to present plans, if you take this assignment, you'll leave for Uxtra, capital of Mars, within the week. Before we go any further, then, what do you say? Will you take the job?"

"Why, sure. It sounds like a vacation."

"You could be mistaken, of course," Basil said curtly. "Now, for details...."

IT WAS all very elaborate in the best cloak-and-dagger tradition. I was to go to Mars for the ostensible purpose of establishing contacts with distributors of electrical equipment, who would act as agents for the firm I represented—the impressively named, but non-existent, Solar Export Corporation. I would stay at a cheap hotel in a rather run-down area of Uxtra and spend my days drumming up business for my firm. Nights I would sit in the bar drinking and winking at any cuties who happened to be around. In short, I was to be a typical traveling salesman.

I think Basil rather enjoyed casting me in this role. It was a dull and respectable one, and he felt those were qualities I lacked. Anyway, on Mars, I was to wait for a contact to whom I'd turn over the papers.

There was a password and countersign but he didn't give them to me right away. I didn't get them until about five minutes before boarding the ship for Uxtra. Meanwhile, Basil told me to spend a week or so learning the jargon of the export business, and something about electrical supplies suitable for a backward planet like Mars.

TEN DAYS after my first talk with Basil we stood together at New

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

York's space port on a ramp that led to the main companionways of the giant *Mars III*. A fine rain was falling and it was cold and miserable standing there in the wind. I pulled the collar of my trench coat tighter about my neck and puffed on a cigarette.

Basil seemed unperturbed by the weather. He watched the passengers going up the ramp with casual, polite interest, and occasionally glanced up at the leaden clouds with a speculative frown.

"You should make your contact within the first week," he said, patting me on the arm and smiling. "If you don't, then something's slipped. Be very careful after that first week."

"Oh, sure," I said, smiling back at him.

He handed me a black leather brief case, zippered shut and locked. "Just pass this on to the contact."

"It sounds simple enough."

"The sign is the sentence, 'Have you ever traveled in Rome?' Your counter-sign is, 'Yes, it's a fascinating city.' Clear enough?"

I repeated the two phrases to myself, then nodded.

"That's all we need to say then," he said. He paused a moment, obviously choosing and considering his next words. "Ashley, I needn't tell you this mission is important."

"No fight talk," I said. "I fight like hell, and you damn well know it, but for my own reasons."

"For money," he said, eyeing me coldly.

"And for nothing else," I said. "But don't worry. I know my trade and I'm good at it."

"Luck," he said shortly.

"Thanks all to hell," I said, and smiled at him and walked up the ramp. At the entrance to Deck 1 I turned and looked down at him and waved.

He looked oddly lonely standing there in the rain, a tall, implacable, stern figure, staring up at me with his hands jammed deeply into the pockets of his great-coat.

He didn't answer my wave so I shrugged and went inside. A bright young officer checked my name against the passenger list, and turned me over to a steward who led me to my small comfortable cabin. He fussed around, snapping on the *visi-screen*, adjusting the gyroscope that kept the bunk level despite the changing angle of the ship, and fluffing up my pillows, until I tipped him and sent him off grinning cheerfully. Then I got out of my trench coat and made a drink, using the black, rum-like liquor that was the only worthwhile thing ever contributed to civilization by Uranus.

After that, and feeling a lot better, I stretched out on the bunk and thought about my job. It didn't seem particularly difficult, except for the fact that Mars was a delicate and sensitive area, and any maneuverings there were potentially dangerous. Basil hadn't liked using me, I thought, smiling slightly. He wasn't a bad sort, but his principles and mine were like parallel lines that could never merge. He believed in Earth and loyalty and self-sacrifice. While I—I believed in myself, Ashley Morgan.

Possibly if he'd my peculiar run of luck he wouldn't be quite so simon-pure.

I'D BEEN commissioned in the Space Arm when I was twenty-one, was a captain by twenty-five. Then, on a routine patrol beyond Saturn, I fired on a ship that displayed no markings and refused to answer my signals.

I was only obeying orders, of course, as any clean-limbed, eager young man might, but that ship was unfortunately carrying the drunken son of Sa-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turn's minister to Earth, and the thing became an inter-Solar incident in one explosive blast.

Right was solidly on the side of young Ashley Morgan. He had photographs of the action, copies of his orders, and the testimony from a spaceport official on Saturn that the destroyed ship had been spirited away against all regulations and orders.

But there had to be a scape-goat. The Minister from Saturn couldn't admit that his dead son was a drunken, irresponsible thief; and so I was court-martialed and tossed out of the service. Privately, I was told that if I reapplied for a commission after the fuss had died down, I would be restored to duty. I told them where they could put that!

So much for the Space Arm. So much for the brotherhood of fighting men, the tradition of loyalty and friendship and all-for-one, one-for-all junk that is preached in recruiting drives. I had enough.

Then there was a business venture. It was hard getting started because of the notoriety I'd gotten during the trial; but I buckled down, worked hard and finally got a few space ships working for me in the freight trade. I had a partner, a gay, laughing chap, who loved life and all of its good things. How well he liked life I discovered one day in a routine check of the books.

It seemed we were broke, the business was in hock, and a flock of insistent creditors were hammering on the doors. The young man got tired of the confusion and put a bullet through his head, and I spent two years settling debts and getting out from under the debris.

After that there was a girl. She was a slim, elegant dark-haired girl, with a hint of mystery in her smile, and a warm delightful sense of humor. It wasn't the traditional sort of humor, however. She liked the idea of men on the hook. That was what struck her as funny. I spent a year and half on the hook, chasing her like a gap-mouthed adolescent, and borrowing everything I could to stay in the race. But it was worth it, because I won the main event.

We were married: Ashley Morgan, the disreputable character who'd been thrown out of the Space Arm, and this exquisite dark-haired girl with the hint of mystery in her slow smile.

Life was a carrousel with twinkling lights for eight months. I couldn't have been happier. And neither could she, I imagined in my innocence.

My closest friend at that time was a quiet, cynical Englishman, whom I'd come to know while trying to repair the wreck of my freight business. He was in my home a great deal those first eight months of my marriage, and he got along beautifully with my wife. I used to think I was the luckiest guy alive. My beautiful mysterious wife and my quiet cynical friend hit it off immediately and that, I thought fondly, was wonderful.

How well they hit off I discovered one afternoon when I came home unexpectedly and found them enjoying what novelists once called an intimate relationship.

The carrousel came to a stop with a jangling crash. I walked out and got drunker than eighty-two lords, and stayed that way for nineteen months and sixteen days.

Then one day I sobered up and realized that the pain was gone. Everything was gone. I felt nothing. Inside I was cold, empty, hollow.

That was when I decided that I was through playing the role of a football in the great game of life. Any kicking to be done in the future would be done by me. I took stock of myself rather critically, totting up my assets and qualifications.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was big, over six feet and topping two hundred pounds. I was healthy, strong as an ox, and could use any known weapon effectively and fly damn near any ship that had been used in the void. I wasn't burdened down with principles. I had no loyalty to any one in the universe but myself, and my needs were comparatively simple. I wanted to enjoy certain physical things of life, and I wanted to be let alone. I wanted no emotional involvements with other human beings.

Adding it all up, I decided to sell what I had to weaker human beings, to those people who had dirty jobs to do and lacked the strength to do them.

Now I'd been at it ten years. I had no reason to regret my choice. I'd seen a lot of dead people, and I'd been responsible for many of those deaths, which didn't bother me one way or the other, and I'd seen at first-hand the dirty needs and motivations of what is laughingly referred to as the noblest of animals, man.

But I was satisfied. I'd lived well between jobs and I was not forced into any close relationship with other human beings. I had resigned from the human race and was glad of it.

MY MEMORIES and retrospections were getting boring, so I climbed off the bunk and made myself another drink, a strong one this time, and then I showered, shaved, changed into clean clothes and walked down to the main salon.

Here was a scene of great excitement. The huge high-ceilinged room was lavishly decorated with richly colorful draperies, excellent furniture, and fine-textured fur-rugs from Venus. As I eased my way through the crowd toward the bar I wondered why the designers of these great space ships still followed the architectural and decorative styles that had been used on Twentieth Century ocean liners.

The gabble of voices made thinking impossible, so I ordered a drink and contented myself with soaking up impressions. There were all varieties of Earth people aboard the ships, and a sprinkling of Martians, who looked, as always, defensive and apologetic in some vague way. Martians with the greenish cast to their skin, the single ridge of bone that grew down from their gums instead of teeth, and their small bodies with the stunted, flipper-like arms, always seemed to be backing away when you talked with them. They appeared nervous and obsequious, and were addicted to clumsy flattery, but underneath all that they hated the people of Earth with a total, all-consuming frenzy. They had reason to, of course.

Also, there were a few owl-like Saturnians, in the salon, huddled together in a corner and peering suspiciously at everyone else with their immense, saucer-like eyes.

The inhabitants of Saturn had developed an intelligent civilization millions of years before any other planet in the System, and were extremely proud of it. They were too well-bred to come out with it openly; but I always felt that behind their big stupid-looking faces and great yellow eyes, they were assuring themselves that, while I was the product of a semi-barbaric land *they* had sprung from the oldest and most gracious culture in the universe. But like most people who worship the past, the Saturnians had no future. Their planet was arid and dead, their culture sterile and static. They were the poor relations of the Solar System and so, like decadent aristocrats everywhere, they drew their robes about themselves haughtily and peered at the other dynamic, growing worlds with disdain.

The man beside me turned and accidentally tipped my glass with his

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

elbow; and after exchanging the usual kind of apologies and reassurances that a situation like that requires, we introduced ourselves and he bought me a drink.

His name was Larkspur, Neville Larkspur, and he traveled in woolens for a firm in Leeds, England. He was a Britisher, a red-faced, too-fat, smiling man taller than I, and wearing tweeds, heavy boots and a genuine, honest-to-the-Lord Burberry. He had scanty black hair, parted neatly to cover his pink bald spot, and his face was as broad and open as a fresh pudding. His wife, who stood on the other side of him, was a slender blonde woman in her late thirties, I judged, and she might have been pretty except for her eyes, which were irritable and unsatisfied. Her name was Nora.

"First trip to Mars?" he asked me.

I told him no, that I'd been there several times.

"On business?" he asked.

His wife leaned over and said to me, "Neville will never let you go if you're in business. Any kind. It's all he knows."

Neville Larkspur laughed good-naturedly. "Not that bad, I hope. But I mean, buying and selling, making plans, developing territory: that's all good fun if you like it."

"Yes, I know," I said. "I'm with an electrical exporting company."

"Capital," Larkspur cried, signaling for more drinks. "I'll bet you've got your eye on Mars the same as I have. It's a tremendous market, y'know. Not in Uxtra, but in the provinces, out where millions of the poor beggars need clothes, fuel, all the rest of it. I say, it's exciting."

"Oh, yes," I said. I didn't need to say anything else. Larkspur obviously had an automatic larynx. He rattled on with happy enthusiasm while his wife sipped her drink and glanced about in a bored manner.

"Now take politics," Larkspur said, making some point or other. "My chief said, 'Nevvy, old man—he always calls me Nevvy—you're cutting off a tough one for yourself, with the state Mars is in.' But I told him, don't y'know, 'Politics and business are two separate things, and don't you forget it.' And it's true, dead true. I don't care a hang about the local government of a country. I sell cloth and I sell it to anyone. Revolutions don't bother me that much."

"You think there'll be a revolution?" I asked him.

"Doesn't matter one way or the other," he said emphatically. "Regardless of what side you're on in a revolution you still need cloth. Right?"

"Right!" I said, poker-faced.

His wife, Nora, tugged at his sleeve, and asked him to take her forward to the main visi-screen to watch the blast-off.

"Right," he said. "Come along, Morgan. Should be a fine show."

I excused myself by saying I had some reports to look over. Larkspur gnawed his lips guiltily, probably feeling that he, too, should go back to his cabin and look at samples or something, but his wife tugged at his sleeve again, and he left with her, after promising to look me up the next day.

Back in my cabin I lay down again and was falling asleep when we blasted-off for Mars. For a few seconds I gave myself up to the rushing sensation, the feeling of enormous speed, that came from the passage through Earth's atmosphere. Then, the booster rockets went off, flinging the mighty ship clear of the planet's gravitational pull, and with that the sensation of speed fell away and we drifted smoothly in the void.

For the next ten days I rested and read, and spent a large part of my time devising ways and means of avoiding Neville Larkspur. He had a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

genius—practically an instinct—for cornering people and driving them into discussions of the wool trade. I was feeling like a hunted culprit by the time we reached Mars, and I breathed a sigh of relief as we moored and I bade him a final, relieved good-bye. No matter what was in store for me on the red planet it couldn't be much worse than Larkspur's ten-day monologue on the glories that were fleece.

CHAPTER II

UXTRA, capital of Mars, was built at the confluence of two mighty canals. It was a city of half-a-million inhabitants, most of whom worked in the ore pits surrounding the area.

The architecture of Uxtra was borrowed, in a hesitant fashion, from all other planets, so that the city was a badly-sorted hodge-podge of Saturnian domes, Venusian grottoes, and ranch houses, skyscrapers, and castles from Earth.

The Martian temperment was essentially nervous, unpredictable, and insecure. They wanted on the one hand to conform, to merge their personalities and dress and manners with those of everybody else, but this need inevitably made them angry and hostile—and they took out their self-hatred on those they needed to imitate.

I've known many Martians under various circumstances and I never could work out a rational foundation or pattern for their conduct. If a Martian liked your hat, for instance he'd fawn around for days to get possession of it, but once having it, he'd become so infuriated at his need to imitate you that he'd stamp the hat into the slime of a gutter. Then, meeting you again, he'd alternately cringe at your anger and boast of what he'd done.

The point was they'd been treated as inferiors so long that they could only adopt two roles with any satisfaction: one, the slave, and two, the conqueror. However, within the framework of these alternatives, were a million or so variations on the theme, and the anthropologists who have sought to expound the needs and pressures of the Martian temperament frequently return from their research with glazed eyes and twitching nerves.

Customs examinations on Mars are usually harrowing affairs because the officials became overly enthusiastic at the prospect of bullying and coercing inhabitants of other planets. However, on this particular morning, the routine was unexpectedly serene. I had to bark once at a pompous official who had started to tear up my shirts, and after that he subsided into cringing acquiescence and finished me up in a hurry.

I ascended the ramp that led up to the ground-level of Uxtra and looked around for some transportation to take me to my hotel. The street I was facing was nearly four hundred yards wide at this point, although I knew that it would narrow down to distances of but several feet as it wound its way through the city. This was a bewildering characteristic of the Martians; they had difficulty deciding how they wanted a thing done, with the result that every change of opinion caused them to scrap their plans and start out with fresh ones. The same was true, of course, with their architectural patterns, which, from where I stood at the moment, presented a truly bewildering spectacle.

I stood for several minutes watching the crowds surging past and trying vainly to attract the motor-hacks that were for hire. But most of these stayed in the middle of the street, two hundred yards away, and couldn't see me. It was laughable in a way. Yet there wasn't too much humor in these curious attitudes of the Martians. There was nothing funny about vio-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lence and bloodshed, and that was precisely what was going to result from the neurotic instability of the Martians. They would blow wide open some day and perhaps blow the whole damn Solar System out of existence.

Finally I did get a hack and got my baggage and myself rolling in the direction of my hotel. Fifteen minutes later I climbed out, badly shaken by a soul-stirring ride; but I yawned as I paid off the driver to let him know I hadn't been impressed. He looked disappointed as he drove away.

THE HOTEL that had been chosen for me was in a narrow dingy street, and was not the kind I'd want for a vacation. Four stories, a sway-backed roof and a general air of financial decadence seemed to be its outstanding features. The neighborhood wasn't in much better shape. The sidewalks weren't paved—the oily red soil of Mars glistened in the weak sunlight—and the coiling ever-present fog was as thick as cotton and about as transparent. Across from my hotel was a gambling house, I knew. I could tell by the gasping, chittering sort of excited noise that came from there. Martians will gamble on anything, anytime, and I've seen them cut off a finger or gash their faces in rage when they lose. Gambling is a religion to them and losing must mean eternal damnation. Listening for a moment in the comparative annonymity of the dirty fog, I could hear noises coming from the wharves which were obviously at the end of the block—the creak of block-and-tackle, the guttural swearing voices of the giant ox-like Venusians, the swish of bilge water—all of these intermingled with the cries of excitement and hysteria that came from the gambling house.

"Helluva place to sell electrical equipment," I thought, going inside.

After checking into my room I put the brief case I'd got from Basil under my arm and went downstairs. It was early, so I went to work like a good little traveling salesman, making my calls, checking my prospects. I had to make my credentials look on the level in case anyone was interested.

I saw six or eight Martian businessmen that day and they were almost as unrewarding as business people from Earth, or anywhere else for that matter. They wanted discounts, special rates and the best end of every deal, and had nothing else on their minds.

But I noticed one thing interesting that day, and that was the odd air of tension in the city of Uxtra. It wasn't anything I could lay a hand on, but I knew it was there, ominous, dark, dangerous. It was in the slanted green faces of the Martians I talked with, and in the restless mindless surgings of the crowds in the street. The very air, thick, swirling, and dense, was explosive.

I'm no schoolboy but I felt somewhat relieved to get back to my hotel, which, while no harbor, was at least a place I felt familiar with, and where I had a certain identity. After shaving and changing into fresh clothing I found a small dimly lighted bar off the main lobby and settled down at a corner table to round out my role by hoisting a few and looking over the feminine field. That was what McGill had told me to do, obviously feeling that any other behavior on the part of a salesman would make him instantly an object of suspicion.

The bartender was an Earthman—he looked as if he were from an Oriental strain—and he knew how to blend his wares.

I had two drinks, enjoying them in a leisurely fashion, before I noticed the girl sitting at a nearby table. She was to my right and in front of me so I could study her without the fear of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

being caught staring. She was about twenty-two or twenty-four, I guessed, although I'm not too good at such guesses, and had shining brown hair that she wore loose to her shoulders. She had delicate pale features, a trifle too haughty for my relaxed tastes, and wore a one-piece strapless garment of ice-green silk that hung gracefully to a point slightly above her knees. Her slippers were of soft felt, and her legs and shoulders were bare. There were several empty glasses before her, and she was nodding her head absently to the tinkling music coming in by transcription from Earth.

WE WERE alone in the room so it seemed very natural—after two drinks—to walk over and sit down at her table. She glanced at me from the corner of her gray-green eyes, speculatively; then she looked away with a bored expression on her patrician features.

"My manners are unconventional," I said. "Sorry."

"So fortunate for me," she said drily. "Now, how about unconventionally going back where you came from?"

"I just got here," I said. "I like it. It's so nice and cool."

She looked away, disdaining to answer.

"How about relaxing that outraged aristocrat pose," I said as pleasantly as I could. "We're both stuck in this ungodly place for various unhappy reasons, so let's be pleasant to each other. Okay?"

She glanced at me with a wry smile. "Define 'pleasant'," she said.

I shrugged. "A drink, a little conversation, that's all. For instance, let's tell each other what we're doing in a place like this."

"Okay. You first."

"I've got no choice. I'm a salesman and this is all the expense account will stand. Now you."

"I'm a professional tourist. My family seems happiest when I'm away, so I make a habit of it."

"And this season you're slumming?"

She glanced at me evenly, her ice-green eyes narrowing. "At the moment, yes."

"That's a quick decision," I said. I was annoyed at her, and annoyed at myself for letting it bother me. But there was something about her cool and haughty smugness that irritated me perversely. "Anyway, I thought we were going to be pleasant," I said.

"Were we?" She sipped her drink, glancing idly about the room. "I feel somehow that ours isn't likely to bloom into a warm enduring friendship."

"Why not?" I asked. I wanted to grab her shoulders and force her to look at me; and I realized that I was being a fool.

"It isn't likely we have much in common," she said, smiling at me as if I were some gauche peasant. "I can't imagine what one would talk about to a traveling salesmen. And frankly, I'm not interested in finding out."

"You mean I aimed too high?" I asked drily.

"Don't fret about it," she said. "It's an occupational disease with optimists and salesmen, I'm told."

She stood and left the room with an easy graceful walk; and I found myself staring at the burnished brown hair falling to her fine bare shoulders, and at the backs of her smooth slim legs.

I shook my head forcibly as she disappeared through the archway; and then I finished my drink in one manful gulp.

"Ashley Morgan, you're a damn fool," I said.

"Ashley Morgan! What luck!" a hoarse and depressingly familiar voice

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bellowed across the room, and, turning, I saw Neville Larkspur, face beaming and hand out-stretched, charging at me from the lobby.

I SIGHED, feeling trapped. Standing, I shook hands with him and we both sat down and had a round of drinks. He was bubbling over with excitement after his first day in Uxtra. I gathered that he had had great success with his woolens.

"Capital people!" he said, waving for another drink. "I say, Morgan, these bounders need everything! How'd it go with you?"

I told him how it had gone.

"Capital!" he said. He leaned closer to me and beamed widely. There was something repellent about him then; for his ruddy skin was oily and his eyes almost disappeared in the rolls of fat about his cheeks. "I say, what's the chance of a little diversion tonight? I mean, a little wine, some feminine company, perhaps, and all the rest of it. Hey?" He straightened and laughed clubbily, slapping me on the shoulder with his big hand. "Hey?"

"Hey!" I said. "What ho!"

My irony, if you'd call it that, was wasted on him. He tittered like a nervous schoolboy in the first pangs of love, and patted my shoulder again. "I saw the little charmer you were talking to," he said, winking at me and wetting his soft small mouth with the tip of his tongue. "Has she got a friend?" he said, tittering.

"It wouldn't help us any," I said.

"You mean she didn't go for you?"

"I'm afraid not." I felt annoyed with Larkspur now. He was too fat and he leered too much, and I had the feeling, unjustifiable perhaps, that his ideas of diversion would run along unpleasant and nauseous lines. Also, I didn't like talking with him about the girl. That was idiotic of me, since she was, in all probability, an arrogant and pretentious snob. Anyway I didn't know her name. I was not living up to my years and experience, I decided. The next thing I'd be slapping Larkspur across the cheek with my glove.

"There's a lot of fish, hey!" he said, cheerfully.

My annoyance at him vanished. He was not a bad sort, in the what-ho-the empire tradition. "That's a consolation," I said. "Now I've got to change. See you later."

"Oh, of course. We're staying here too," he said. "A bit of luck that, eh?"

"Oh, yes indeed," I said, and went up to my room.

I put the brief-case that Basil had given me on the bureau; and carried a robe into the bathroom and shaved and showered. It was about eight-thirty then, Earth-time, and outside it was starting to get dark. I combed my hair and then, holding the robe about my middle, opened the door and walked into the bedroom.

I got a nice surprise. The girl from the bar was stretched out on my bed, holding a drink in her hand. She smiled at me as if we were ensconsed in a bridal suite.

"Hello there," she said. "I'm Gail Revere and haven't you got big shoulders."

I WASTED no time in repartee, but ducked back to the bathroom and got into the robe. Then I walked back in and stared down at her quizzically. "What's the idea?"

"You prude," she said. She was wearing a peach-toned wrap-around and high-heeled satin mules. There was nothing prudish about her, I decided, if a casual disregard for the conventions was any criterion. She seemed unconcerned at the fact that her negligee was parted, revealing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

slender legs that were tanned to the shade of well-creamed coffee.

"At the risk of being repetitious," I said, "what's the idea?"

"Don't be so grim," she said, with a mocking little smile. "It doesn't become you. Anyway, I thought you wanted to be friends."

"Okay, so we're friends," I said. I made myself a drink and lit a cigarette. I didn't understand this pitch; and it worried me. I realized that I was worried because I hadn't thought she was the type for this sort of act. I had thought she was haughty, overbearing, even rude; but I'd also thought she would be pretty decent about the big things if given a chance.

"Hello, friend," she said, and patted the bed with her hand. "Sit here and talk to me of friendship."

"How'd do you get in?" I said.

"My room is just down the hall, so we're neighbors, you see. And when I saw you come up here—I peeked, I'll confess—I bribed one of the little men who make the beds to let me in."

"The little man will spread the news about with great relish," I said drily.

"Do you care?" She looked honestly amused. "I thought traveling salesmen were always famous as backstairs Casanovas. I thought they learned it at school somewhere, along with how to handle difficult prospects."

"Let's don't talk about it any more," I said, taking her glass. "It's a dull subject."

I filled her glass and sat beside her again and took her other hand in mine. It was a beautiful hand, soft but capable, with slim sensitive fingers.

"You like it?" she said, smiling.

"Oh, very much. Everything about you is excellent." I saluted her with my drink. "You're a remarkable production. Also, you're intriguing. Did you learn that at some school?"

The room was warm and still, and the scent of her hair was in the air. From outside a ray of capricious light touched her throat and I saw the tiny pulse beating softly there.

I kissed her then, and it wasn't right. She didn't act like an excited young girl with an odd passion for strangers. She was holding something back, although she tried not to. I sat up and finished my drink.

"What's wrong?" She was laughing quietly. "Are you frightened? Are you worried about gossip?"

"No, I wanted a drink," I said.

"That's rather brutal of you, I think."

"We don't owe each other anything yet," I said.

I put the drink down and kissed her again; and this time it was different. Her body, slim and straining, pressed close to mine, and her lips parted warmly.

She pushed me away and swung her legs off the side of the bed.

"Now you want a drink, eh?" I said.

"No, no," she said, and looked away from me. "I—I have to go now, please."

"You started this, remember," I said. I caught her shoulders and spun her around. "Look at me, damn you," I said, and my voice was low and bitter. "What right do you have to use your body like a counter in a game? Is that your idea of fun? To prove something to yourself by cheating me?"

"No, no," she said again, and turned her head away. "Please, I must go."

I shoved her away from me and lit a cigarette. "Get out!" I said.

She hurried to the door and when she turned back to me, strangely, she was smiling.

"I'll see you again, Morgan," she said, and slipped into the corridor.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG.
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I MADE a drink and ran a hand through my hair in complete bewilderment. This girl was enough to send me straight to a loony bin. I drank my drink and watched the glowing tip of my cigarette; and I made up my mind to let her alone. She did something to me that upset my usual reactions. And in the game I was playing I couldn't afford to be anything but what I was; namely, a man whose reactions were bought and paid for by the Federation.

I was standing in the center of the room when the abrupt shattering knock sounded. It wasn't a polite knock; and I had a hunch who it was. I've been around and I've learned a lot about the way people knock on doors. Waiters tap respectfully; creditors with righteous insistence, and women demandingly but gently. The police make up the only class which hammers away bluntly, angrily, pompously.

I opened the door and they spilled into my room, five little Martian policeman, wearing their absurd gold and red cone-shaped headpieces, and damn near bursting with authority.

Two ran into the bedroom, looking for what I couldn't guess, another jerked open the closet door, and the remaining two stared at me with mingled anger and fear.

"You come with us," one of them said, and waved a paper in my face. It was a warrant of some sort, directing them to take me to their headquarters. There was no point in arguing.

"I've got to dress," I said.

"No dress!" two of them squealed in unison. "Come immediately."

I put my hands on my hips and glared at them. "I'm going to dress," I said grimly. "Suit, shoes, socks, shirt and tie. I'm going to take my time, and what in hell are you going to do about it?"

They peered at each other fearfully and chittered back and forth in their own language.

Finally one of them said, as if it were his idea: "You dress! Hear?"

"I hear. Now get the hell into the corridor while I'm at it," I said, and jerked open the door. "Get out!"

They went outside mournfully and squatted in the hall. I slammed the door and got dressed. Basil's briefcase was still on the bureau, and I wondered what to do with it. I decided to take it along. If the Martian police got hold of it that was too bad. Basil should have given me more information about what to do in the case of a mix-up.

I was angry and annoyed over this silly arrest, and about the girl. Things were not breaking right and I was getting mad. That wouldn't help, of course, but it was a slight relief to enjoy my own reactions for a while.

CHAPTER III

THEY TOOK me to the central Administration building of Uxtra, led me down six or eight flights to the subterranean quarters of the prefect of police, let me in a brightly lighted room with a high ceiling and a minimum of furniture. The walls were covered with maps showing various areas of the planet, and even I, no map-making authority, could tell that the representation was grossly inaccurate. Mountain ranges were taller in ratio than they actually were, and the lakes were broader, the plains vaster and greener, and, on the whole, the maps represented nothing but an idealized picture of Mars. This was part of the Martian temperment, one of its dangerous phases. They were blind to their faults in many instances, believing them to be virtues.

A door opened and a squat Mar-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tian in a green tunic entered and sat down at the one desk in the room. He was unusually ugly, even for a Martian. His head slanted back to a point and the single ridge of bone in his mouth gleamed unpleasantly. He wore thick glasses and there was an angry scar running the length of the right side of his face. After a curt glance in my direction, he bent over some papers on his desk, ignoring me completely. So I turned my back to him and lit a cigarette; then wandered about gazing at the maps. That bit of childish by-play went on for perhaps five minutes; then, in an angry voice, he snapped: "Do you know why you were brought here?"

I turned and gave him a surprised look. "You speaking to me?"

"Who else is present?"

"Well, you might have been talking to yourself," I said mildly. "Now what's on your mind?"

"I—am—the—prefect—of—police—of—Uxtra. My name is Atillo. I repeat: do you know why you were brought here?"

"Haven't the foggiest idea. One minute I was getting dressed, peaceful and relaxed, and the next thing I knew your pack of squealing puppies was yapping at me. What goes?"

He sat back in his chair and studied me calmly. "I see it amuses you to be insulting. That is a curious reaction of people from your planet."

"Well, I don't like being dragged out of my room for no reason," I said. "What do you expect me to do? Sing your praises and beg your pardon?"

His hands—thin rudimentary instruments at the tips of flipper-like arms—trembled nervously. He finally cleared his throat and said, "Let us confine ourselves to the matter of the moment, Mr. Morgan."

I knew my direct attack had upset him. "Okay, fine," I said.

"Your name is Ashley Morgan and you represent the Solar Export Corporation, that is right?"

I nodded. "I'm here to line up some people who'll handle our products on a retail basis. Most of our customers on Earth are in the electrical business. You probably know that already," I said casually.

Atillo bobbed his head. "Yes, we know all that, Mr. Morgan. Tell me this: last year were you not involved in a murder on the planet of Venus?" The weak eyes behind the thick glasses glittered at me as he smiled and glanced down at a paper on his desk. "The facts, as I recall them, were that you, representing at that time an insurance company, shot and killed a courier of the Venusian Autocracy. The incident had a strong political tone to it, until it was disclosed that you were mistaken for someone else and had acted only in self-defense."

I LIT a cigarette, realizing that Atillo had gone to greater lengths than Basil—or I—had imagined he would in checking up on me. I said cautiously, "The whole thing was a mistake from start to finish, I guess. I was the most surprised guy in the place when that character went for me."

"I'm sure," Atillo murmured. "But wasn't it fortunate for Earth that the man you so accidentally killed was also their sworn enemy in the councils of Venus. Hmmmm?"

"I never thought of it that way," I said blandly.

The incident Atillo was referring to had occured during a job on Venus, when I was acting as an ear for the Federation. The events that precipitated my killing a certain Aurocrat *were* accidental—although the result to Earth was beneficial in the long run.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Atillo stood and walked around the front of his desk, frowning. "Mr. Morgan, you may be the harmless representative of an electrical wholesaler. I do not say that you are not. However, today on Mars, the political situation is delicate. You know of the rebel Zatoll?" he asked, glancing at me suddenly.

"I've heard of him," I said. "He's operating out in the hills somewhere though, isn't he?"

"He cannot be depended on to stay there," Atillo said drily. "That is why we who are charged with the safety of this city are perhaps overly cautious. That is why I asked to have you brought in for questioning. We are investigating everyone and everything that might be related to Zatoll. You can understand that, I'm sure?"

"Oh, sure," I said.

"The destiny of Mars, Mr. Morgan, cannot be fulfilled if we are torn asunder by internecine warfare. That is why Zatoll must be stamped out like some virulent plague."

"That makes sense," I said, in my best innocent manner. "But what is the destiny of Mars?"

Atillo smiled at me and said, "You will learn that in good time, Mr. Morgan. Mars has been an object of ridicule in the family of planets long enough. We are a power and we must be treated as such." He turned to the maps on the wall and flung out his arm in an angry gesture. "There is the planet of Mars, mighty, resourceful, powerful! Its manifest destiny is to avenge those planets which plundered her, mocked her in her hours of helplessness."

Atillo was growing angrier each second he talked, as I'd known he would. He held himself in better control than most Martians; but beneath his rigid self-discipline surged the characteristic Martian need for revenge against the outlander.

There was just enough justification for his position, of course, to make me feel slightly uncomfortable.

WHEN the Solar System was first opened up by Earth, Mars was populated by a class of beings which at that time were termed savages. These pitiful creatures had no civilization or culture, they had not learned to farm the land or domesticate the huge animals of their planet; and because of their interminable senseless wars it was almost impossible for them to improve their position. The first voyagers from Earth hunted the Martians down like animals and destroyed them by the thousands. It became a pastime for sports-loving Earthmen to make trips to Mars for the express purpose of hunting the creatures who lived there. They hunted them from planes and automobiles with high-powered rifles, and the pictures of the chase were shown in Earth-side theatres for the edification of huge audiences.

A number of the creatures were captured alive and shipped back to Earth where they were exhibited as freaks; and this practise led to the use of the Martian as an industrial unit, which was the tactful way their slavery was described. Thousands of them were put to work in the fields and mills and factories of Earth, and they were quick to learn and desperately eager to please because they knew that if they didn't they would be sent back to Mars to become running targets for the sportsmen of Earth. They were well treated physically, but it was the sort of treatment normally accorded to animals. They had no rights, no freedom, and if they so much as put a foot on the bottom rung of the social ladder they were apt to be shot.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Meanwhile, the land of Mars was discovered to be fertile, and its hills and ground rich in important ores. Oil was found, great oceans of it, and forests of wonderful trees.

Obviously, it belonged to no one, so it went on a first-come, first-served basis. Great industrial combines set up operations on Mars to convert its raw wealth into money, and the money in turn into the pockets of the company's Board of Directors and stockholders.

However, the philologists were learning the Martian tongue, and anthropologists were examining their background and, here and there, voices were heard deploring the rape of their land and wealth. The voices grew in volume over the years, and eventually Martians were given their freedom, and it became a civil offence to steal their property. Also, handfuls of Martians had taken to the hills of their country with rifles stolen from careless sportsmen, and with these and other weapons which they bought, they set about taking the sport out of Martian-hunting by firing back at the hunters.

It was a long slow process and it was over before I was born, of course; but there was a certain type of Martian who could never forgive or forget those black days of early colonization. Atillo was obviously one of such.

He was still glaring pridefully at the outrageously flattering maps of his land.

"We are now a great planet," he said. "We have weapons, industrial might, and our people need more land in which to express their hopes and individual needs."

"That's okay with me," I said, yawning slightly. That wasn't completely an act, because I was tired and bored. Politics had never impressed me as a suitable topic of conversation for sensible men. That probably was why I could work with either side in any dispute with equal efficiency.

"I won't keep you, Mr. Morgan," Atillo said. "Remember our conversation. We do not wish to have our problems with Zatoll complicated by outside intervention. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly," I said.

"Very well. I hope for your sake we do not meet again," he said, and turned toward the door.

"We will if you need any electrical equipment," I said, and waved airily at him as he left the room.

I was taken back to my hotel by two of his comic-opera cops, who left me at the lobby with grave bows. That was that.

I WAS walking toward the stairs when something caught my eye from the bar; and glancing in I saw Neville Larkspur and my auburn-haired girl friend sitting together and laughing companionably.

What was her name? Gail Revere, she'd said. That was it. Gail Revere.

She looked lovely now in an ice-blue gown that hugged her slim body appreciatively; and as she laughed and moved her head, light sparkled in her smooth shining hair. Larkspur was knocking himself out being amusing, I could tell. He was letting out bellows of laughter and occasionally patting her bare shoulder with an avuncular gesture. He'd step up the tempo of his approach after she'd had a few more drinks, I decided bitterly.

Upstairs in my wide lonely bed I lay awake several hours smoking cigarettes chain-fashion and thinking gloomy thoughts.

There was a criss-cross pattern of light on the ceiling of my room, thrown there by the street lamps. I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

followed the lines with my eyes as if they were the forgotten streets and lanes of my own life, searching for something I couldn't name.

Memories were flooding my mind. I recalled young men I'd known in my cadet classes in the Space Arm, and the girl I'd married. It had all gone smash. It wasn't tragic, of course. It was just life.

I was in a bitter mood as I lay waiting for dawn and thinking of a girl with brown hair letting a fat lecher paw her like a piece of merchandise.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEXT morning I discovered that Atillo, the prefect of Martian police, wasn't a very trusting sort of person.

He had put a couple of his men on my tail.

They prowled after me as I went through the city giving a first-class performance of an eager go-getting salesman. A heavy murky fog lay over the streets and they were forced to trot practically at my heels to keep me in sight. We ignored each other completely. However, it got to be a nuisance after a while. I was getting slightly worried because my contact hadn't shown up yet. Basil had said if there was no contact within a week to look out for trouble. Well, three days had gone by and I was still holding the brief case. I wanted to unload it and finish my end of the job.

Thinking about this, I was afraid that Atillo's men might get in my way; and so I decided to give them the slip.

I tried the usual tricks, doubling and re-doubling my tracks, slipping in and out of stores by different exits, but they stuck like glue. They knew the city better than I and were apparently anticipating my dodges.

I was thoroughly annoyed by the time I started back for the hotel. This thing was becoming a bore; and also it was a bit embarrassing to be frustrated by a pair of cops whose combined IQ's probably wouldn't match that of a backward child.

Then I saw her strolling toward me, the auburn-haired girl from the hotel. Gail Revere. She was window-shopping and hadn't seen me yet. I glanced around quickly and saw my two shadows coming along behind me, half-way down the block; and I suddenly realized how I could shake them.

I walked toward the girl, smiling. She saw me and stopped, looking flustered and nervous. I thought she might pass me without speaking.

"Well, this is nice," I said, taking her arm.

She said unexpectedly: "I've been wanting to talk with you, Morgan. Could we have a drink?"

I smiled down into her eyes. "I'm afraid not. I would have last night but the Englishman beat me to it. Did you have fun with him?"

"That's none of your business," she said in a furious voice; and color mounted in her cheeks.

Atillo's men were not thirty feet behind us now, motionless as two tree stumps in the coiling murky fog. I took a notebook from my pocket, tore off a page and scribbled on it with my pencil.

"What are you doing?" she said, puzzled.

"You'll see," I said, and caught her hand and pressed the paper into the palm. Her fingers closed on it automatically.

"What's this?" she said frowning.

"I'll see you later," I said, and stepped out into the street and flagged down a speeding cab.

"Please wait, Morgan," she cried,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and there was a note of panic in her voice.

I DIDN'T understand that, but I had no time to think about it. The cab stopped, I jerked open the door and hopped inside. I saw the two Martian police converging swiftly on the girl; and I knew I'd guessed right. They were faced with the alternative of following me, or arresting the girl. And in the light of my suspicious exchange with her she would undoubtedly appeal to them as the most important target. They might have split up, of course, one tailing me while the other grabbed her, but Martians of the lower orders have an almost pathological lack of initiative. They don't act, they react. And always typically, predictably.

The girl saw them coming relentlessly toward her through the dark fog, and she must have suspected what was happening; for she wheeled and ran toward my cab.

The driver put the vehicle into motion with a shuddering jerk that knocked me back against the seat and, in the confusion, I heard Gail shout something to me that made no sense at all because I couldn't hear clearly enough. We pulled away and through the rear window I saw that the two policemen were holding her arms and one was talking to her gravely.

I settled back and lit a cigarette. They'd let her go when she produced her identification, I was sure. I wasn't worried about her safety. But something else about her did worry me. I couldn't come to a conclusion about her or settle our relationship, slight as it had been, into a satisfactory mold.

At the hotel I paid off the driver and gave him an extra tip for his speed. He was a smiling little chap and, for a Martian, unusually good-humored. He thanked me for the money, and then said: "The woman, she lost, hmmm?"

"Lost? No, I don't think so."

"But on wrong planet, hmmm?"

I frowned, trying to puzzle out his meaning. "No, I'm sure she isn't."

He shrugged and shook his head smiling, obviously searching for words to convey his meaning. Then he said, brightly: "Woman run after cab, hmmm?"

"Yes, she ran after the cab," I said patiently.

He smiled triumphantly, his point made. "Woman ask if I travel in Rome, hmmm? Rome not on Mars. On Earth. I know from school."

"Well, good for you," I said. "You see, education pays off."

"Hmmm?" he said, grinning.

Then it hit me with a sickening impact! I grabbed the little Martian by both arms and shook him roughly. "What did she say?" I said, keeping my voice down with an effort.

He was terrified; he obviously thought I'd gone crazy. "I mean no harm!" he cried out.

"It's very important," I said, as calmly as I could. I released him and cursed myself for being an excitable ass. "Just tell me exactly what she did, please."

"She say do I travel in Rome, or do I like it or something," he said, watching me fearfully.

"Thanks," I muttered, and hurried into the hotel and up to my room.

The only thought in my mind was that Gail Revere—the girl who'd bewildered and upset me more than any woman in my life—was the Federation's contact!

She was the person I was supposed to give the brief-case to, the link between the Federation and Zatoll.

And I had tossed her into the arms of the Martian police!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I MADE myself a drink and tried to think clearly. Atillo obviously suspected me; when his men brought in a girl who'd had some strange doings with me he'd feel that he'd caught onto part of the pattern. Still, he had nothing definite to base his supicions on. And Gail might be clever enough to tell a convincing story. There was nothing incriminating in the words I'd scrawled on the paper, and she might get away by telling Atillo that it was a private joke of some kind, or that she too was in the dark. Her credentials and papers would be in order, and Atillo couldn't go too far with an ostensibly innocent person.

There was nothing to do but wait it out, I decided bleakly. If she wasn't back at the hotel by tomorrow morning it would be time to start worrying.

But I was worrying already. I did some thinking about myself then without spectacular results. Why was it, I asked myself, that I felt perfectly free to use human beings any way I wanted, as long as it furthered my ends? I had tossed her into an uncomfortable situation, an embarrassing one certainly, without the slightest hesitation, because I needed a diversion to get myself in the clear. I hadn't known then that she was a Federation contact, which would have made a difference; but I *had* known that she was a human being, a woman with innate dignity and pride. But that had made no difference to me, obviously. I'd held human beings way down on the list of things I'd respected; and for the first time in years I was beginning to wonder painfully about the validity of that list.

That night was tough. I didn't sleep; I drank steadily and chain-smoked while I paced back and forth in the darkness of my room.

At eight the next morning I called the desk and asked for Miss Revere. I waited impatiently for a few minutes; and then the clerk said with cold profession politeness that her room didn't answer.

For several seconds I stared at the phone as if it were some object I'd never seen before. Then I put it down and went into the bathroom and splashed cold water over my face. I slipped into a clean shirt, hung a shoulder holster in place, and put on my jacket and trench coat. Then I lit a cigarette and went out.

My first stop was the consular office of Earth. I talked to a grave young attache named Nelson. I explained that a friend, Miss Gail Revere, was missing, and would he check with the Martian police to see if they had any report on her.

He made several calls, talked to men in the office of the prefect of police. He gave them the description I'd supplied and they promised to check the records and call back.

They did in about an hour.

They had no record of a Miss Gail Revere, or of anyone corresponding to her physical description.

Nelson looked at me skeptically. "She might just have changed her plans and left here, you know."

"She didn't, I know," I said. "The police are lying."

"Why should they be interested in her?" he said; and I saw that he was taking in my unshaven appearance and obviously impatient attitude. I couldn't tell him why the police wanted Gail. I couldn't tell him what my job was, or why it was imperative that Gail be gotten out of Atillo's hands. We were in this thing alone. I was the only one who could help her, and I felt as helpless as a man with a broken back trying to lift an anvil.

Nelson smiled at me, one man-of-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the-world to another. "Sometimes when a young lady goes into hiding it is because she wants some certain party to—ah—come hunting for her."

"Oh, hell!" I said, and walked out.

I KNEW then that Atillo was hanging onto Gail. She would have been back at the hotel hours ago in the normal course of things. He must be convinced that he had something now. Otherwise he'd let her go. Gail might have talked, of course. I wasn't too squeamish to admit that possibility. Atillo would know a thousand delightful tricks to break her down. The Martian temperament was very exquisite in some of its destructive manifestations. Their coercive techniques would make a brass statue talk.

I went back to the hotel and checked her room. I knew there was no point to it but I did it anyway. There wasn't any point to it. She wasn't in.

The hours drifted past with agonizing slowness. I sat on the edge of my bed staring at the face of a clock I was beginning to detest. The thought that the time might be passing infinitely more slowly for Gail brought sweat out on the backs of my hands.

Finally I lit a cigarette and made a call. I had to go through several functionaries before reaching him, but eventually I made it.

"This is Ashley Morgan," I said. "We talked together yesterday, if you remember?"

"Morgan?" Atillo's voice was politely blank. Now he had me and he was going to make it count. I cursed him mentally.

"The electrical supplies salesman," I said. "We talked about a murder on Venus."

"Oh, yes," he said, too casually. "What is it you want?"

"I'm rather worried about a friend of mine," I said. "She's disappeared without leaving any message and I thought you could help me find her."

"That is very sad," Atillo said. "Tell me, what is this woman like?"

I described Gail to him; and I hated the sound of his unctuous voice repeating the description insinuatingly, salaciously.

"It is too bad that such a pretty specimen of your planet should be missing," he said. However, wait a moment. I'll have the hospital records and arrest forms checked."

I knew what his answer was going to be, so I wasn't surprised when he said, a moment later: "I'm sorry, Mr. Morgan. We have no record of her here. We will be happy to send out an alarm for her, if you think that necessary."

"It might be a good idea," I said. "She was planning to return to Earth tomorrow and her friends are worried."

Atillo's voice was heavy with sympathy. "I'm sure they are, Mr. Morgan. We will call you if there is any news."

I said thanks and hung up the phone with a crash. Atillo had her for sure, I knew now. And he was hanging on to her. I sat down and stared at the clock again and tried to force some sensible thinking from my weary mind.

That produced nothing.

I WENT down to the bar in desperation because I couldn't stand my room any longer, or the evil clock or leeringly silent phone. Neville Larkspur was there with his wife, Nora. She was sipping a drink with a petulant look on her lean face; Larkspur had his beefy arms on the table and was talking at her with beaming enthusiasm. As I came up he was saying, "—six thousand bolts, my dear,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and I said to the chap, 'You'll take twice that much next year, mark my words', and y'know, the beggar will!"

He jumped up when he saw me and insisted that I join them for a drink. It was getting late, and I was nervous, but there was nothing better to do, so I sat down with them. His wife brightened somewhat then, because I think she hoped we might get the conversation away from woolens for a change.

But that was all Larkspur knew, obviously. He told me of every call he'd made that day, of what the reactions had been, and he speculated with an almost indecent relish on his projected tour of the inlands and provinces.

"Virgin territory, what?" he said, chortling. "Beggars have never even *seen* cloth!"

I felt an irrelevant pity for his wife, but I couldn't stand him any longer. Excusing myself I went back upstairs to my room.

The time was about nine o'clock. Gail had been in Atillo's hands for more than twenty-four hours. I paced the floor, cursing pointlessly; making a drink whenever my thoughts got too hard to handle.

My phone rang with startling shrillness. I lifted the receiver and felt a apprehensive chill down my back as I recognized Atillo's voice.

"Mr. Morgan, I was expecting to hear from you," he said, with an unpleasant chuckle.

"Why?" I asked.

"Let's be mature about this," he said sharply. "I have the girl, of course—your contact. I know that you are in the employ of the Federation, and I know of the briefcase. I know of the plan to bring information to Zatoll."

That was deflating news; and my first reaction was to curse Basil inwardly for not making more intelligent plans. Obviously he'd put Gail and me out like sitting ducks for Atillo to shoot at his own convenience.

"Well, go on," I said tiredly.

"I want you to come to my office with the briefcase immediately. You may wonder why I didn't simply take it from you, and the fact is that I don't want separate pieces of the pattern, but the whole thing in its entirety. I want you, the briefcase, the girl, and the next person and the next until we reach Zatoll. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," I said. "But you didn't learn much about me from your snooping, my friend. I got paid to do a job, and it didn't include running to you and yelling quits. Zatoll will get that briefcase if I have to take it to him personally."

"You're being foolish now," he said gently.

"Go to hell," I snapped.

"One moment, Mr. Morgan." There was a pause, then I heard a racking, anguished scream. "That is your friend, Miss Revere," Atillo said, chuckling. "I am sure she would be more comfortable if you came over to see me." The receiver clicked.

I banged the phone down; there was clammy perspiration on my forehead and my hands were shaking like a dope addict's.

This was the inevitable end, the stone wall I'd been heading for ever since I resigned from the human race. I had made a life of sorts by ruthlessly relegating human beings to a position of secondary importance; and that callous objective indifference had been my strength, my stock in trade, the thing I sold to people who needed it.

Now it was no good. I couldn't be callous and indifferent to Gail Revere; but if I went to her help it would mean throwing overboard the only principle I'd managed to salvage from the wreck of my life.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I RUBBED my hand across my forehead and laughed bitterly. The one thing I had to sell—loyalty—was the only thing Atillo wanted. If I sold out to him I'd be through in my job, and through as a unit of life. I'd have nothing left and the first breeze would blow me away.

I picked up the brief-case and flung it across the room. Basil had trusted me to get it to a contact, who in turn would send it on to Zatoll. If I crossed him, gave it to Atillo instead, I might plunge Earth in war, or upset the present tense balance in the Solar system.

I didn't give a damn about that, I knew.

The girl was what mattered; and, I thought with insane irrelevance, I didn't even know what she liked to eat or drink, or what kind of music pleased her, what friends she had, or whether she used sugar in her coffee. I didn't know a damn thing about her, and yet I knew as much as I needed to know.

I jeered at myself bitterly: "Morgan, the tough guy who'll do any job for cash. He's above human pettiness, jealousies, attachments, loyalties. Give Morgan a job to do and enough money, and you can be damn sure it will get done. He's no bargain in any other sense, but he will fight like hell for your team once he joins up."

I sat on the edge of the bed, tired, empty, confused; and picked up the phone.

Atillo wasn't surprised at my call. "You're coming right over, I'm sure," he said pleasantly.

Once I'd made my decision to call him I could feel the weary weight lifting from my mind. I seemed suddenly sharp and alert again, and it was a good feeling.

"I called to bargain," I said.

"I am not interested in bargains," he said shortly.

"Listen a moment! you've got her but you don't have me or the brief-case. You say you can get me. All right; I want the girl. But on my terms."

"You are not making much sense," he said.

"I'll meet you in an hour, but not at your office," I said. "You bring the girl, and when I see that she's unharmed and free, I'll turn over the briefcase."

"I can get that any time I want it," Atillo said, and he sounded disappointed. I had intrigued his gambling instinct; and he wanted to play with me now.

"Probably," I said. "But I've got something else you could use, I think."

"Oh, yes? And what is that?"

"I've worked for every planet in the system, Atillo, on such things as defense plans, production bottle-necks, new weapons, and so forth. I'll give you the benefit of my information if you set the girl free."

He laughed. "What makes you think you know anything that would be worth-while to me?"

I thought hard for a few seconds, digging through my memory for some fact, some theory or guess, with which I could startle him; and I hit on something a Venusian minister had told me while thoroughly drunk the year before.

"Well?" Atillo said.

"For a start," I said. "Venus has copies of your plans to build forts in space that would be held there by gravity. Does that interest you?"

There was a pause. Then Atillo said: "Would you meet me at my apartment in an hour? Bring the briefcase and the girl may go free. You and I will have many long talks, I feel, Morgan."

"No funny stuff, Atillo," I said.

"Certainly not," he snapped; and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gave me the address of his apartment.

I picked up the briefcase and slipped into my jacket, and while I was trying to anticipate how Atillo's mind would be working now, there was a knock on the door. A cheery rat-a-tat-tat.

It was Neville Larkspur and his wife, Nora. They must have caught the annoyance in my expression, for Larkspur said, "Oh, I say, you're going out, eh?"

"Immediately," I said.

"I told you," his wife said peevishly. "Won't you ever learn that everybody isn't interested in having a nightcap and talking over the woolen business?"

"Well, I say," Larkspur said, flustered.

"Come in, anyway," I said. "I've got five minutes."

They came in, Larkspur grinning gratefully, and his wife with a philosophical shrug. I closed the door and went to the dresser where there was a tray of drinks. "Can I fix you something?" I said.

"That would be cozy," Larkspur said.

I turned around, and found that he was holding a gun in his right hand and regarding me with a jolly smile.

The muzzle of the gun was pointed at about where my third vest button would be if I wore vests.

"The briefcase, please," Larkspur said genially.

CHAPTER V

"WHAT THE hell kind of gag is this?" I said, dazed.

"No gag at all," Larkspur said. Come, Morgan, don't look so unhappy. We're both in the same game, you know. I'm on a job for Saturn. They want a look-see at what Earth is promising Zatoll."

"I'm not in my best form on this trip," I said, feeling like an absolute fool. It began to be very clear now in retrospect. "I should have known, I suppose. All that spirit-of-the-empire, and the what-ho's, and I-say's. Pretty damn obvious. And a Burberry, to top it all."

"No professional aspersions, Morgan," Larkspur said. "It worked, and that's what counts. I just heard you talking to Atillo about ransoming Miss Revere with the briefcase. Silly thing to do. No money in it. Your phone is hooked into mine, of course."

"She's in a very tight spot, I suppose you know," I said. "If you take that briefcase she probably gets her fingernails pulled out."

"Very unfortunate for the young lady," Larkspur said. "But in our work, Morgan, we have to avoid being overly sentimental about the messy things that happen. Pity, because she's a clever girl. I think she tumbled to me. You know, I wasn't sure of you for a while. I knew one of you must be a Federation agent, but she staged such a convincing act by running to your room that first night that I was confused. I knew you'd met in the bar, and that she bribed someone to get into your room, and that she came out later looking upset and with her lipstick smeared—well, don't you see, it looked so damn realistic?"

"Okay, what now?" I said. I didn't want to hear him talking about her any more. Everything inside me was pulled up into a tight aching knot.

"The briefcase, of course."

He came across the room to me and took it from under my arm, and all the time he held his gun well away from my reach. That done, he slipped his hand inside my coat and fished out my gun and handed it to his wife.

"Now, Morgan," he said, "I am going to leave. Nora will stay with you for at least an hour. She is an excellent shot, and let me point out that she is armed with *your* gun, and that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

if she shoots you her defense will be air-tight. You are a known Casanova in this hotel, and what more typical than that you would lure my wife here to make advances to her—and what more typical than that my wife, who is an unshakeable pillar of virtue, should pluck your gun from your holster and shoot you dead."

I WATCHED him as he moved to the door, every muscle in my body tensed to leap if he gave me the slightest opportunity. But he kept clear of his wife so that the gun in her hand was on me unwaveringly; and he was careful to put his gun into a pocket that was beyond my reach.

"I hope we meet again under more congenial circumstances," he said, smiling. "Perhaps we could talk about the woolen business. Exciting, what?" he said, with a mocking return to his former manner; and then he opened the door and disappeared.

"You sit there," Nora said, pointing to a straight-backed chair. She crossed to a deep chair and settled down comfortably, legs crossed, the gun held in her lap. "Now," she said, as I sat down, "let me tell you this: I'm a fine shot and I'd like nothing better than putting a bullet through your stomach. You big strong men bring out the worst in me."

She obviously meant what she said. I studied her casually, trying to solve the problem of her personality, because that was the only chance I had to make a break. She was an unusually fastidious woman. Her pleated skirt was pressed impeccably, and her white blouse looked as if she'd just put it on. Her beige stockings were pulled up to wrinkle-less perfection, and everything about her was clean and scrubbed to an almost neurotic degree. I noticed that when she shifted the gun from one hand to another there was a smudge of oil on one of her fingers; and as she sat watching me she rubbed that finger fiercely against the chair upholstery.

"Why do you men keep guns in such filthy condition?" she asked irritably.

"They need oil," I said.

"Oh, they need oil, do they?" she said, mockingly. "Why don't you men ever say you don't know? You're all as smart as God, aren't you? Never at a loss for an answer!"

The dissatisfaction that I had noticed about her eyes was more intense now; and I wondered fleetingly what had happened in her relations with men to develop her violent attitude.

"How about a drink?" I said.

She glanced at the tray on the dresser, then back at me. "Okay," she said. "Make two. Put yours on the floor near your chair. Hand me mine and be damn sure you stretch when you do it. If you get too close I'll shoot."

I made my drink and put it by my chair, moving very carefully. She was watching me through lowered lids, the gun-muzzle moving with me; and I had the chilling feeling that she wanted to shoot.

I stood at least three feet from her chair and extend the drink to her; and as she reached for it I tipped it almost imperceptibly, but enough to allow a few drops to fall on her leg.

"Damn you!" she snapped.

"I'm sorry."

"You clumsy fool!"

She held the drink in one hand, the gun in the other, glaring at me angrily; and I stared down at the spot on her stocking distastefully.

"That looks like hell," I said.

"Well, get me a handkerchief," she said shrilly. "You're the type of slob who enjoys spoiling a woman's appearance."

"Okay, okay," I said, and turned away from her, as if I were

(Continued on page 118)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Snow, Beautiful Snow

By A. T. KEDZIE

IN TERMS of grandeur and breath-taking awesomeness, the scenery afforded Earthmen is small potatoes. Jungle terrain, desert flatness, mountainous regions—all have been rhapsodized by explorers for ages. But for sheer alien-ness, for the feeling that they are simply off this planet, no Earthly region can compare with the Arctic or the Antarctic regions, especially the latter.

It was no accident that led the makers of such a masterpiece of horror as "The Thing" to select the Arctic regions for the setting. Nowhere else in the world can such a sense of utter desolation, isolation and barrenness be offered. In the bitter cold, completely remote from Man's handiwork like cities, surrounded by nothing but endless mile upon endless mile of ice and snow, illuminated by the feeble candle of a remote Sun, the Arctic and Antarctic regions give some small touch of being off this world.

The fantastic hardships that men have undergone to conquer these areas make the regions act like the personification of the Marquis de Sade. No environment is more inhospitable to Man and his works. When the stars are conquered eventually, when the rockets have broken their trails to space, it will still be possible to say proudly, "...but it wasn't as bad as the Antarctic..."

No matter how dreadful or severe the conditions of another planet technology will by then so have insulated men with mechanisms and structures that their conquering of that domain will reduce itself to a metal against environment struggle—not one of flesh and blood against the elements, as the Arctic has demanded.

Consider a landing on the Moon. This will be done in spacesuits, of course, and barring unpredictable accidents will not demand incredible stamina which is routine in Antarctic work. Even if accidents occur on Luna, merciful death will intervene rapidly—the torture of slow freezing, of starvation and hunger are not likely to be present.

Mars, though still unknown, similarly will be conquered by technology. Courage aplenty will be demanded, but courage reinforced by all the skill a world can supply. Think of these things in contrast to the heroic endeavors of a Cook, a Shackleton, a Nansen, or a Byrd. The first steps of a baby are the hardest—the Earth was tough to beat, but the planets will come easier!

AN AMAZING BOOK BUY!

BEAUTIFULLY BOUND, REGULAR LIBRARY EDITION

"THE FLYING YORKSHIREMAN"

10 STRANGE ADVENTURE IN THE WORLD OF FANTASY

By Eric Knight

Here is one of the most outstanding book values we have ever offered! "The Flying Yorkshireman" brings you ten unique and amazing experiences in the wonderous world of fantasy. You meet the strange giant of the mountain who wasn't human!... Watch gypsy magic turn a beast into a lovely girl!... Experience the exhilerating sensations of the Yorkshireman as he finds he can overcome the earth's gravity!... Plus seven more unbelievable, thrilling adventures! Over 280 action-packed pages. Standard 5 1/4 x 8" size—not a pocket-book. An unbeatable book buy!

NOW ONLY 35¢ (WHILE SUPPLY LASTS)

It's hard to believe...but it's true! This superb, illustrated book, bound in handsome green cloth cover (of a quality found in books priced at $3.00 and up) can be yours for only 35 cents in coin sent today. It's a book that will bring you unmatched thrills...and one you'll be proud to add to your library!

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

HURRY! SEND COUPON OR WRITE TODAY!

QUANTITY IS LIMITED

READERS' SERVICE BOOK CLUB

119 E. San Fernando St., Dept. Z-12, San Jose 13, Calif. Here is my 35c! RUSH MY COPY OF "THE FLYING YORKSHIREMAN"...TODAY!

Name .....

Address .....

City .....State .....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looking for a cloth or handkerchief.

Then I took a deep breath, and wheeled back to her, my hands lashing out for the gun. I saw the instant I turned that my idea had been right. Obviously, the minute I'd looked away her gun-hand had moved automatically to the spot on her stocking. She was so fastidious and correct that she couldn't help making that gesture.

MY HAND struck the gun, knocking it from her grasp. She shrank back from me, the cords in her throat tightening, but before she could scream I had a hand over her mouth. She clawed and kicked at me like something inhuman as I swept her into my arms and carried her to the bed. There I gagged her with my tie, and used my belt to strap her arms to her body. I got two more ties and bound her legs at the knees and her feet to the iron headboard of the bed.

I glanced at my watch and saw that thirty-five minutes had passed since I talked with Atillo. My gun was on the floor near the deep chair and I retrieved it and dropped it into my pocket. I opened my grip and took out a tiny .25 caliber automatic and put it in my trousers pocket. That was for show. Neither of those weapons was likely to help me. I also took from the grip a slim ray-tube which I dropped into the upper pocket of my jacket beside a pen and pencil. That might be some help.

At the door I turned back to Nora's trussed and wriggling figure and said: "Someone should be along in an hour or so. Don't take it too hard. Relax."

She made a noise that could have meant anything; and I walked out and closed and locked the door behind me...

CHAPTER VI

THE ADDRESS Atillo had given me was in an area that had gone wild over an architectural style that featured a variety of street levels, and buildings that were recessed like a wedding cake. I climbed up and down a dozen or so ramps looking for the entrance to his home, and the coiling yellow fog didn't help matters any. I felt as if I were wandering through an enlarged version of a fish-bowl castle.

Eventually I found his number attached to a steel door at the end of a curving lane. I pressed a button beside the door and waited with my hands in my pockets and a cigarette hanging from my lips. My nonchalant attitude was more than a pose. I really felt that the issue was already decided, the results tabulated, and that all I could do was play my part.

Atillo opened the door and smiled at me coldly. "I thought you might have changed your mind," he said.

"No, I got held up," I said, truthfully.

"Please come with me."

I followed him down a flight of steps to what appeared to be a sitting room, and then on into a narrow chamber fitted out as an office-study. There were two chairs, a desk, and maps and charts on the wall. In an alcove was a narrow bed, and on it lay Gail. Her breasts rose and fell evenly with her breathing, and her eyes were closed.

I walked over to her, quietly. "Gail," I said, and took one of her hands in mine.

She opened her eyes and saw me. There was no mark on her that I could see but she seemed tired and weak. "Hello there," she said. "They said you were coming. I didn't believe them of course. You must be a remarkable man, Morgan."

"No, I'm not remarkable," I said. "Are you all right, Gail?"

(*Continued on page* 120)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HISSING STARS

By JON BARRY

MAYBE WE ought to be ashamed of ourselves. Our activities on Earth seem to be earning us the jeers of the stars. At all events, hundreds of them are certainly hissing at us.

Just what these peculiar noise-makers look like, astronomers haven't been able to find out as yet. Only one or two have been definitely identified with a telescope.

The hisses don't come from the nearest of the stars with which we are familiar, nor from the brightest. The noisy stars seem to signal their presence with radio waves rather than with visible light. Usually, there aren't even any outstanding stars in the regions concerned.

Astronomers are divided on the identification of the hissing stars. Some believe they are black stars, giving out no light. Others suggest they are dwarfs. Still others figure them as supergiants. They are also considered to be planetary nebulae, with the star in the center of the ring broadcasting the microwave radio signals. But there is complete agreement on the fact that these are most unstable stars with frequent flares as are noticed on the sun, but occurring billions of times oftener.

TINY TYPER A. T. KEDZIE

SOON PERHAPS the busy secretary will be able to transcribe her letters while going home in the subway. A French inventor has just perfected a typewriter said to be small enough to be carried in the ordinary-sized pocket. It can be held in the palm of one hand, and typed with the other.

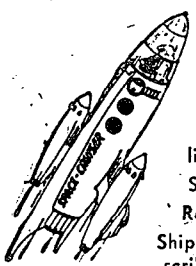
The inventor has done away with the conventional typewriter roller in his new product. He places circular sheets of paper on a revolving cylinder to meet the keys. Every time a key is struck, the cylinder is revolved to the next position, where the next letter is to be typed.

Another time-saver, by a Canadian inventor, is a revolving spaghetti fork. Once these go into production, you won't have to worry any more over having to slur long spaghetti strings into your mouth. You won't have to worry about endlessly twisting the spaghetti onto a fork and then having the whole thing slip off just as you are about to mouth it.

This new invention provides a fork where the shank and tines revolve independently of the handle, by a flick of the thumb on a small wheel attached to the shank.

FROM THE FUTURE!

SPACE MEN AND MACHINES OF THE FUTURE EVERYONE CAN OWN, NOW!



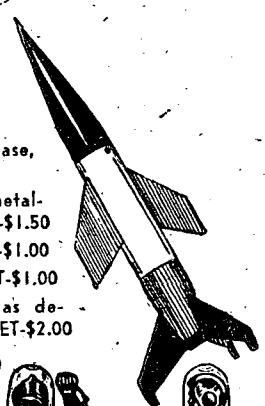
The perfect decoration anywhere in the home-desk, bookcase, shelf or cabinet. The ideal gift for all ages.

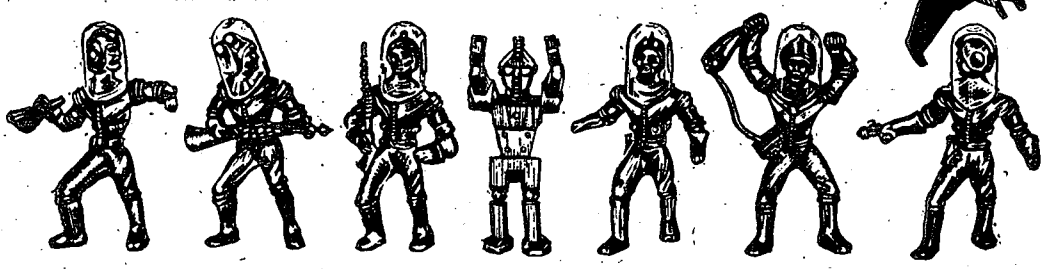
Robot and 6 Space Men, over 4 inches high, in assorted metallic colors, with removable space helmets. NET-$1.50

Space Cruiser, approximately 10 inches long, solid colors. NET-$1.00

Rocket Space Ship, over 14 inches long, in 3 colors. NET-$1.00

Ship and Crew Set - Rocket Space Ship and 5 Space Men, as described above. NET-$2.00





SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Save postage charges by remitting with order.

TERRA IMPORTS

893G MORRIS AVENUE, NEW YORK 56, N. Y.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh yes, I'm all right."

Her hand was limp and cold, but her fingers clung to mine with a childish need, "I'd like to go away from here," she said, and I saw tears in her eyes.

"Okay, we will," I said.

I stood up and faced Atillo. He was standing by his desk, a quizzical expression on his slanted features. In the smallness of the room I felt that I towered over him by a good two feet.

"Now, the briefcase, Mr. Morgan," he said quietly.

"I don't have it," I said.

"No?" His voice sharpened. "Where is it?"

"It's rather involved," I said, and grinned.

"I'm not interested in complicated lies," he said, acidly. Raising his voice he barked a sentence in his own language.

A door at my left opened and three of his uniformed stooges pattered into the room. At another word from Atillo they converged on me with weapons in their hands.

"You tried to make a fool of me," Atillo cried.

His men found the revolver in my coat pocket and, with cries of triumph, the smaller one in my hip pocket. I did my best to look disappointed when the second one was pulled out and handed to Atillo.

He tossed both guns on his desk and faced me angrily. I knew then that I had wounded his vanity and outraged his dignity. He was literally trembling with rage. This reaction, magnified a million times, was something the entire Solar system would face one day, I thought irrelevantly. The Martian characteristic of obsequious instability overlay deep hatreds that could only be satisfied by uncontrolled, sadistic domination of every living organism.

"You lied to me," he said, shouting the words as if they were the vilest of insults.

I REALIZED that the presence of the uniformed Martians meant that Atillo had never intended to play fair with me, of course. He wanted what I had to give him, and after that both the girl and I would be shot and dumped into the canal. That is, if we were lucky. He might keep us around for a few weeks as playthings, which would be much worse than being shot.

"I will teach you a lesson," Atillo said. "I will teach you—and this girl what it means to lie and cheat and betray. I will take you both to my headquarters, and teach you the meaning of truth."

"No, Morgan!" Gail cried. "I can't go back there."

I knew that this was no occasion for strategems or tricks. The situation had reach an elemental stage beyond ruses. If I could have fooled Atillo some way I don't think I would have tried. But now I wanted our clash to be brutal and final. One way or the other.

"I don't think you'll have to go back," I said to Gail; and then I grabbed for the ray tube in my breast pocket.

I caught the three uniformed flunkies flat-footed, guns limp in their hands. The streaking blue ray flashed out across them and they went down screaming. Atillo wheeled toward his desk, his delicate hands scratching for my gun. The heavy-caliber weapon was too large for him, and he let out a howl of rage as it slipped from his fingers. He dove for the smaller gun with the speed of a cat going for a mouse, and then twisted back to me.

I had plenty of time to get ready. And when he swung back I chopped

(*Continued on page* 122)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OF MEN AND ICE WORMS

By PETE BOGGS

WHEN ROBERT SERVICE quoted his famous line "...the ice-worms wriggle their purpole heads through the crust of the pale-blue snow" he knew what he was talking about. The human body can't take the cold of Arctic sub-temperatures and still operate with any degree of efficiency. Right now in view of the possibility of Arctic warfare scientists are making a systematic study of how to enable humans to endure these sub-zero temperatures. This involves a detailed analysis of the heat-generating system of the body and above all, a knowledge of how clothing insulates the body. Both of these subjects are more complicated than you might think.

To begin with, the human body is effectively a heat-engine capable of delivering enough energy each hour to raise several pounds of water to a temperature of a hundred degrees or more! That's a lot of heat. Obviously if a man could be completely sealed in a perfectly insulating suit, and this heat prevented from escaping, he could stay as snug and warm as a bug in a rug, no matter what the outside temperature. Unfortunately, clothing is far from a perfect insulator. Also, the bitter wind of the Artic sweeps the layers of insulating air from the skin and soaks up this heat faster than it's generated. And another complication is added by the fact that the body is also throwing off water vapor which must be gotten rid of.

With these factors in mind, a thorough study of clothing has been made. In particular, it has been found that the Eskimos know exactly, by pure experience, how to resist low temperatures, and their dress is the object of much research. Unfortunately, soldiers can't dress like Eskimos—there simply isn't enough caribou skin and fur to supply hundreds of thousands of men, nor can it be treated the way the Eskimos do—chewed that is—to make it soft and flexible.

At present, pretty effective cold-weather clothing has been made. But even at its best it is inefficient and something better is wanted. Undoubtedly, the only solution that will be near-perfect will depend on some sort of electrically heated suit. With resistance wires threading through the clothing, and with plug-in cords to electric generators and batteries, low temperatures can be conquered. At present, thme drawback here is suitable electric generators which will operate in Artic circumstances. But this is only a matter of time.

START AS HIGH AS $3,795.00 YEAR

Many Early Examinations Expected. Prepare NOW! Veterans Get Special Preference! 32-Page Civil Service Book FREE. Mail Coupon Today SURE ☆

COUPON

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
Dept. P-114
Rochester 4, N. Y.
(Not Government Controlled)

Gentlemen: Rush to me, FREE of charge, list of U. S. Government big pay jobs. Send FREE 32 page book describing salaries, vacations, hours, work, etc. Tell me how to qualify for one of these jobs.

Name .....
Street .....
City .....Age? .....

FREE FOR ASTHMA

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a FREE trial of the FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing.

Frontier Asthma Co. 308-T Frontier Bldg.
462 Niagara St. Buffalo 1, N. Y.

HYPNOTISM

Learn to apply this tremendous POWER. Develop will-power, self-confidence, self-control. ANYONE can master this exciting, profitable profession in short time by training at home, with GUARANTEED RESULTS. DON'T DELAY... Write to America's oldest Hypnotic school for free information now-today!

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED HYPNOLOGY
Dept. 161, 120 Central Park So., N. Y. 19, N. Y.

ESCAPE FROM BONDAGE

"AWFUL DISCLOSURES"

Young Montreal woman dares to tell the truth in her "Awful Disclosures." This amazing book describes in detail terrible experiences of helpless and defenseless girls secluded from the world. Twenty great chapters. Read this frightful, heartbreaking story of crime which the author asserts is true. 106 burning pages. Postpaid only $1.00.

Book Shop, Dept. ZD-1, Rowan, Iowa

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the hard edge of my palm down at the junction of his shoulder and neck. He screamed in pain and the noise obliterated the sickening crack that sounded as his neck broke.

He stumbled forward to his knees and his glasses fell to the floor, shattering. I hit him again then and he went down without another sound. His cheek was pressed against the splintered glass and one eye looked sightlessly toward the ceiling.

I grabbed my gun from his desk, slipped it and the ray tube into my pocket and then turned to Gail. She was trying to sit up, and I saw that she was sobbing.

"Please, please," she said, putting out her arms to me.

"We're going," I said. "Hang on!"

I scooped her slim body into my arms and headed out of Atillo's house on the dead run. Nowhere in the universe do you kill prefects of police with impunity. Certainly Mars was no exception.

I descended four or five flights of steps, going from one level to another, until I reached a broad avenue. There I saw a cab. Hailing it, I climbed in before it came to a complete stop, and told the driver to get me to the Earth Consular offices as quickly as possible. . . .

WE CAUSED quite a stir at the consular offices. Nelson, the attache I'd talked with before, didn't know what to make of us, and escorted us to a rear office with flattering gravity.

I put Gail on a couch and asked Nelson for a drink. He hesitated, obviously confused and bewildered, but he finally brought me a decanter of brandy and two glasses.

I held Gail's head in my arm and helped her to take a sip or two of the liquor. Then she lay back, breathing more easily.

"You're okay now," I said. "Just keep thinking about that. Everything is over, and you're okay."

She tried to smile. "I was right, Morgan. You're a remarkable guy."

Nelson coughed firmly. "I insist that you tell me what is going on here."

I let him have it in simple declarative sentences. "We are working for the Planetary office of the Federation. We had a job here. I just killed Atillo, the prefect of police. I also killed three of his stooges. We are hotter than the exhaust plates of a space fighter. You'd better get the Ambassador on the phone. And the Consul. And Earth. And God, if you have His number."

Nelson proved to be a sterner character than I'd imagined. "So you killed Atillo, eh?" he said, interestedly. "You'll probably be decorated, you know." Then he went to the phone.

I was holding Gail's hand tightly. When Nelson began talking I looked at her, and we were more alone than we had ever been before. I released her hand in embarrassment.

"We just might get away with this," I said.

"Earth can't throw us to the wolves," she said. "We've got them in a spot now."

I said yes.

"Thanks, Morgan," she said. "You didn't have to come after me, you know."

"But I did," I said. "I had to."

She was silent a moment. Then she said: "It wasn't too bad after a while. They put you on a table and you couldn't move a finger. And then they did something with wires. You felt that every nerve was being strummed by a banjo pick. I was beginning to get used to it."

"Don't talk about it now," I said.

But she needed to talk about some-

(*Continued on page* 124)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How BIG Is Space?

By JOHN WESTON

SUPERLATIVE like "super-colossal" and "ultra-gigantic" are almost diminutives when applied to a recently discovered group of incredibly huge variable stars located in and about the Magellenic Cloud. Their brightness periodically waxes and wanes, but they are not novae, those brief-lived flaring stars. Each one of eighteen of these stars is greater than a billion times our own sun in volume! Furthermore, in diameter each of these stars is about *five hundred million miles*, a matter of five times the distance from the Earth to the Sun. Were such a star located where the Sun is, the orbit of Jupiter would skim its surface. It is hard even to contemplate such hugeness.

The periodicity in which the stars grow and men diminish in brightness ranges from twenty-four to about a hundred and seventy-five days and they attain a brightness more than a million times that of the Sun. They are exceeding the quantity of light they blast out only by the supernovae—and then not by much. Because of their remoteness they appear as dim thirteenth-magnitude stars and require powerful telescopic observation.

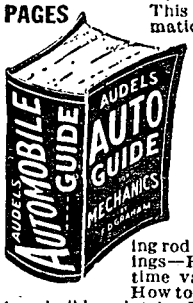
With the upset in astronomical thinking caused by the knowledge that the vastness of space is filled with hydrogen-matter which acts as a re-fueling source for stars sweeping through it, astronomers are hard put to classify these strange giants. In fact, there may be a radical revision of all astronomical thinking because of recent observational discoveries which seem to indicate that the universe is not the decaying thing it was once thought to be.

These eighteen gigantic stars of course have gaseous densities; that is, they are thinner than rarefied gases and in no way compare with the "white dwarfs" or even with our own rather dense Sun. But because of their size their over-all volume makes them incredibly massive and powerful gravitational influences on surrounding stars. When they are located in pairs or with dim invisible stars, a very eccentric orbits are noted, further confirming the massiveness.

In a discovery of this magnitude we may perceive the extent to which the science of astronomy has evolved since the days of Eddington and Jeans and LeMaitre, whose cosmologies have so contributed to the advancement of all physical science.

WHAT ALL AUTO MECHANICS WANT TO KNOW

1800 PAGES



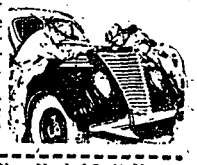
This Big Practical Book gives full information with working diagrams covering the principles, construction, ignition, service and repair of modern cars, trucks and buses.

Diesel Engines, Hydramatic & Fluid Drives Fully Explained.

A complete Guide of 1800 pages, with over 1500 illustrations showing inside views of working parts, with instructions for service jobs.

IT PAYS TO KNOW

How to fit pistons—How to locate engine knocks. How to fit connecting rod bearings—How to service main bearings—How to recondition valves—How to time valves—How to adjust fan belts—How to adjust carburetors and chokes. How to rebuild a clutch—How to service automatic transmissions—How to service brakes—How to adjust steering gear—How to cope with ignition troubles—How to service distributors—How to time ignition—How to "tune up" an engine.



$4 COMPLETE • PAY $1 A MO. TO GET THIS ASSISTANCE FOR YOURSELF SIMPLY FILL IN AND MAIL COUPON TODAY.

AUDEL, Publishers, 49 West 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.
Mail AUDELS AUTO MECHANICS GUIDE ($4) for free examination. If O. K., I will send you $1 in 7 days; then remit $1 monthly until $4 is paid. Otherwise, I will return book promptly.

Name_____

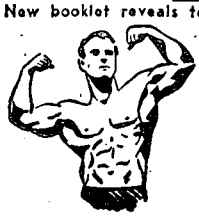
Address_____

Occupation_____

Employed by_____ ZIP

How to Build Your Body without Exercise!

New booklet reveals tested secrets of body building. No apparatus or weights. Completely safe, proven method. Results guaranteed. Send only $2.00 * for booklet.



*Calif. residents add 3% tax.

LACY INSTITUTE
Box 510Z
Whittier, California

ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS FOR MEN ONLY! POCKET SIZE!

THEY'RE TERRIFIC! PACKED WITH RARE CARTOONS and GOOD CLEAR ILLUSTRATIONS AS YOU LIKE IT. RICH IN FUN and HUMOR. 20 BOOKLETS ALL DIFFERENT, SENT PREPAID FOR $1 IN PLAIN SEALED WRAPPER. NO C.O.D.s.

NATIONAL, Dept. 578, BOX 5-STA. E, TOLEDO 9, OHIO

TREASURE MAP OF U. S.

It's here at last! Your complete treasure guide to the 48 states, Canada and Mexico. This extra large (26" X 42") exciting map is literally crammed with buried treasures, lost mines, sunken galleons, hidden caches, etc., and fully locates and describes each lode. No more guesswork,—actually see where $300,000,000,000 lies hidden,—where fortunes are recovered each year,—where gold objects are found without digging. Beautifully illustrated, this unique map is a 'must' for treasure hunter, adventurer and hobbyist. $2.00.

VICTORIA Dept. Z P. O. Box 25 Price Hill Sta. 5, Cincinnati, Ohio

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing. She said, "Did you meet Larkspur?"

"Yes. He told me you were suspicious of him. You were right."

"I put on a good act, didn't I? I went to your room like a professional. I was going to be very thorough about it, so everyone would think we were just casual lovers. But I couldn't go through with it, Morgan."

THERE WAS a ring from the outside bell and I straightened up, suddenly tense. I put my hand on the gun in my pocket and got to my feet. If this was a hunting party from the Martian government I wasn't going to play by their rules.

Nelson glanced worriedly at me and hurried out to answer the door. He came back a moment later, smiling, and behind him strode a tall, impeccably dressed man, wearing a black Homburg and dark great-coat.

It was Basil McGill, the last person I expected to see at this particular place and time.

"Hello, Morgan," he said, as if we were meeting for lunch. "There's nothing to worry about, I don't think. Take you hand off the gun."

He smiled fleetingly as he said that, then stepped past me and looked down at Gail. "You won't last long if you don't take better care of yourself, my dear," he said. "Nelson," he went on, and his voice was cold with emotion. "Take her in my car to our *dispensary*. Get every doctor and nurse up if you must, and see that she's taken care of."

I watched her as Nelson and an assistant took her from the room. Her eyes met mine as she went through the door; but her face was expressionless.

I poured myself a heavy drink and sat on the edge of Nelson's desk. The time had come, the time I knew I had to face. I felt hollow and useless.

"I'm washed-up, Basil," I said tiredly. "You were right when you said you couldn't trust a man who worked for money. I sold you out this time."

"We got Larkspur, you know," he said casually. He poured me another drink.

I raised an eyebrow. "You know all about it then?"

"Yes. We learned he was in on the show so we sent another team up here. I came along for the finish. The briefcase is on its way to Zatoll."

I said drily, "You move in mysterious ways your wonders to perform."

There was a heavy silence in the room. Basil sipped his drink and I stared at mine. "You know I tried to swap the briefcase for Gail, I suppose. I was ready to give it to Atillo when Larkspur came on the scene."

"Yes, I know." Basil lit a thin cigar and frowned. "Would you do it again?"

"Of course," I said.

"I was afraid you'd say that. I'll make arrangements to get you back to Earth." He hesitated a moment, staring at the tip of his cigar. Then he said, "Good-bye, Morgan," and walked from the room, erect and composed.

"Good-bye," I said. Then I put my glass down and rubbed my forehead tiredly. It was all over and it had been even worse than I thought it would....

THE SPACEPORT was deserted and cold and lonely as I stood waiting to board the ship for Earth. Basil had cleared everything in a smooth behind-the-scenes maneuver.

I stood at the foot of the ramp smoking a last cigarette, the collar of my trench coat pulled up tight against the sleety chilling winds that blew across the field.

The voice of the port dispatcher announced the space ship was ready

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for blast-off. Passengers were instructed to board immediately.

I turned, looked back at the operations rooms, the Customs sheds, the lighted passenger lounges, and then flipped away my cigarette and started up the ramp. Another job done... but this was the last one. That made a difference. That and several other things.

Halfway up the ramp I heard my name called faintly and, turning, I saw a slim figure in a belted raincoat running toward me from the passenger lounges.

My heart began to pound foolishly as I went back down the ramp. She came up to me, breathless, and there was rain in her hair and on her cheeks.

"Morgan, you can't leave me like this," she said; and then I saw that it wasn't rain on her cheeks.

I caught her in my arms and after I kissed her, we both began talking very fast about how it had been with us, and then we both stopped and began laughing.

"We've got to remember to send Basil a wire," she said, hugging my arm against her body.

"Basil?" I stopped and looked at her. "Why Basil?"

"He told me you were leaving, and he fixed things for me to go along."

"He wanted you to go with me?"

"I think he's an old match-maker at heart," she said. "He said you were the greatest guy in the world."

"He said that?" I was having trouble believing any of this.

"Yes. And then he said a funny thing about you."

"What was that?"

"He said you were loyal to yourself, and that was the only loyalty that counted."

"Come on, let's go," I said, looking down into her smiling face. And I realized I was smiling, too.

THE END

NEW LIFE
FOR YOUR OLD TV TUBE
Unconditionally Guaranteed
to make your old tube bright again.
Vivian Picture Tube Booster
Simply plug in to add up to one year or more to the life of the tube. Can be installed on any standard set from 10" to 30" in 30 seconds.
$5.95
send check or money order (no CODs)
to VIVIAN SALES CO. P.O. BOX 150
Ridgefield Park, N. J. Dept. A

YOU CAN Stop SMOKING
BANISH TOBACCO
in all forms with BAC-O-BAN,—the safe, effective treatment for both MEN and WOMEN. Gain freedom from Tobacco Slavery with this wonderful NEW discovery. NICOTINE is HARMFUL, so let BAC-O-BAN help you break this unhealthful habit TODAY.
BAC-O-BAN tablets are guaranteed to give quick results, or your money refunded. You'll feel better and sleep better. Rush $2.98 for liberal supply, or pay Postman $2.98 plus 45¢ C. O. D. charges on delivery. Send order TODAY to:
THE DILBECK CO. Dept. 204
P. O Box 14706 Cimarron Sta., Los Angeles 18, Calif.

BECOME A
MENTAL SUPERMAN
OVERNIGHT!
Floor everybody! No studying! Revolutionary MEMO-PROP does all your thinking! It's uncanny! Unprecedented! Full MONEY-BACK GUARANTEE! FREE LITERATURE! Write:
BIJOU HOLLYWOOD STUDIO
BOX 1727-ZF HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

BOOKLETS
The kind grown ups like. Each one of these booklets is POCKET SIZE, also contains 8 ILLUSTRATIONS, and is full of fun and entertainment. 12 of these booklets, ALL DIFFERENT, shipped prepaid in a sealed wrapper upon receipt of $1.00, or 24 BOOKLETS, ALL DIFFERENT, shipped prepaid for $2, cash or money order. No orders sent C.O.D. PRINT NAME AND ADDRESS & Mail to:
TREASURE NOVELTY CO., Dept. 36-Q
2 Allen St. New York 2, N. Y.

Study HYPNOTISM!
FASCINATING! Almost Unbelievable
This unusual course reveals the fundamentals of PRACTICAL hypnotism. It discloses how an expert operator performs—how he has developed his PERSONAL POWER and uses it to bring others under his domination and control. Illustrated instructions. Startling low price. Full satisfaction or refund guaranteed. Only $2.95 postpaid . . . or C.O.D., plus postage. Send for "Hypnotism Course" today!
COMPLETE PRICE only $2.95
NELSON-HALL CO., 210 S. Clinton St., Dept. AX-56, Chicago 6, Ill.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mechanical Man

By Tom Edsman

NO ORGANS are more difficult for a surgeon to work upon than the heart and lungs—and of course, as a glance at the insurance statistics shows, no organs are more subject to killing conditions. Because both heart and lungs must be kept in continual operational function while surgery is being performed upon them, the surgeon is handicapped a thousandfold. As a result, markedly successful work upon these organs is, if not exactly a rarity, certainly not common.

But Dr. Gibbon of the Jefferson Medical College predicts that within a year there is going to be a steep increase in the success of such operations. This increase is dependent upon the wonderful robotic machines which have been developed to replace the heart and lungs during an operation.

"Mechanical hearts" and "mechanical lungs" have been built which are out of the experimental stage. In the case of the heart-machine, direct connections are made with the large aorta feeding the heart with blood, and thus the powerful human organ is completely bypassed while an electrically driven glass-rubber-plastic pump substitutes for it. It is impossible for the blood flow to fail under these circumstances and the surgeon can operate quite drastically under what are called technically "dry" conditions. This means that many heart operations of a severe nature are going to be a success.

Similarly with the lungs. Here, new machines oxygenate and remove carbon dioxide from the blood. aAgain the machines depend upon simple mechanical and chemical principles—but are miracles of precision construction. They are usually built in tandem and supplied with an extra power system so that nothing, not even electric power failure can interrupt their operation.

It is not impossible to imagine, in view of these successes, that the time will come when it will be possible to keep alive a person whose natural organs have deteriorated to the point beyond repair. In effect, a human being can be a compound of flesh and blood—and machinery. While it is not likely that this can be done on a grand scale, in certain modifications it may give sufferers a new lease on life.

You can look to biology, to medicine, to the "life-sciences" in general, for the startling advances to come. These fields are just beginning to ally themselves with physical science, and we have come to take the miracles of the latter pretty well for granted.

The Life Secret

By Morris Small

NOTHING is more complex or mysterious than the nature of life—even the organic chemists who perform miracles as a matter of routine will concede that. What makes protoplasm tick, they just don't know. But, bit by bit, enough knowledge is being put together to show encouragingly that life may not be so mysterious after all. As usual, this hopeful clue has been added by physicists working with the gigantic cyclotron at the University of California.

By bombarding a water solution of carbon dioxide—the gas from "dry ice"—with forty million volt beams of helium ions, they were able to synthesize directly small quantities of formic acid! This incident is quite spectacular, for pure radiation on an atomic scale has been used essentially to produce an organic chemical very important in life processes. Naturally this is not an artificial "life" process because, after all, men having been making formic acid for many years in the chemical laboratory by conventional chemical means. The point of the matter is that radiation was the agent.

It is possible to visualize a time when the Earth was barren, but continually under the bombardment of a cosmic radiation many times as intense as that of today. Conceivably, this might have initiated the life cycle through a synthesis of organic chemicals—might even have induced the "miraculous spark" itself.

This new field of investigation—the application of atomic radiation to organic chemical study—will very likely produce an infinitely better understanding of what makes living things tick. In fact, some researchers believe that we are on the verge of a revolution in biology and the life sciences comparable with the industrial revolution of a hundred years ago. This time, they think, biology will make such incredible advances as to render physical science child's play. Of course this is but a guess, but now that a direct connection between synthesis and radiation has been made, an encouraging and promising step in that fabulous direction has been taken. Some day the scientists may very well tailor-make organic things as a mechanic now assembles a machine. Don't underestimate the boys with the microscopes—they may not know numbers, but life after all, is not a "numbers game"...

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mineral Trouble Ahead

By GENE SNOW

DESPITE the wonder metals of aluminum, magnesium and titanium, few people can argue that ours is an age of iron. The world gobbles steel, half of which is made in America, at the rate of two hundred million tons per year. And everywhere the gigantic ore deposits are dwindling. The famous Mesabi Range in Minnesota, whose ore is so rich you can just shovel it into a furnace, is running down slowly but surely, and already the lesser ores are being picked over.

Executives in many a board room are sweating over the prospects of new ore sources, for the future looks as though it will be a more voracious consumer than the past has been. Civilization is founded on steel.

Fortunately, technology has not exhausted its bag of tricks. Vast new deposits of rich ore have been discovered in Labrador, hundreds of miles from water and railroads. But the engineers are at work, and the railroads are going in. In a few years this ore will go into the hungry furnaces of Chicago, Detroit, Gary and Pittsburgh. But still more ore must be found. There is plenty of low-grade ore, inexhaustible amounts, for example, of the famous taconite. Technology has gone to work on this stuff, devised concentration processes, and the ore is already moving toward the furnaces.

Scientists, examining the whole picture, and extrapolating to the future, see a time when men will have exhausted the known surface ore deposits. That time will come, perhaps not for a hundred years, perhaps not for five hundred years, but it will come. What then?

There are two courses left open: devise new metals which are plentiful, or locate new ore sources. The latter is a definite possibility although it may mean we will have to grub deep into the Earth, perhaps under the oceans. The former is already in practice and much of the work of iron will be done by titanium and other metals. But iron is necessary in electrical work. So it will have to be found.

Copper is another item in short supply. Right now, desperate measures are being taken to find it, or to substitute for it. Unfortunately it is hard to substitute for its electrical properties, although aluminum is doing a very good job. The trouble with the latter is that usually it's more bulky in the application.

The COMING of the SAUCERS

At last! The authoritative report on the sky mystery that has startled the world. The sensational result of over four years of investigation.

By the two men who know most about it!

KENNETH ARNOLD & RAY PALMER'S DOCUMENTARY ACCOUNT

No trickery; no lies; no practical jokes. The truth and nothing but the truth, with all official "smog" stripped away. Privately printed and uncensored!

BOOK NOW GOING TO PRESS!

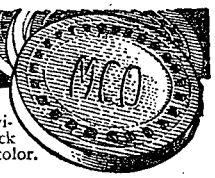
SPECIAL PRE-PUBLICATION PRICE—$4

(Price after publication will be $5)

Only Prepaid Orders Accepted—Order Now From

RAY PALMER, AMHERST, WISCONSIN

POKER CHECKS



Famous Hub Checks, Non-Duplicate, Square Edge, Heaviest Game Check, Cut and Stack Accurately. Supplied in any color.

FREE CATALOG Expose: The Open Book, Sealed Book, Scientific Betting, Master Key System, How to Control Fair Dice, Runup System, Plastic Playing Cards for Club Use.

"The Old Reliable"

K. C. CARD Co., 807 S. Wabash, Chicago 5

ILLUSTRATED BOOKLETS & NOVELTIES

Our VEST POCKET series of ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS are the kind that are Fully Illustrated with comic characters. The Novelties are the kind You want for Excitement and Amusement. 16 Different booklets and 4 Different novelties sent prepaid in sealed envelope on receipt of $1.00. No C.O.D. orders or checks accepted. Wholesale Price List included with orders only.

LIVE WIRE NOVELTY CO., Dept. 108-Q
3 Orchard Street New York 2, N. Y.

Earn cash from your hobby, no matter what your hobby may be. IT CAN BE DONE. My folio gives complete instructions. Send today. You'll be glad you did. Only $1.00.

Chester H. Garlanger, 1010 Pearl St. St. Joseph, Mich. Ask for HOBBY folio.

INTERESTING PICTURES

FOR YOUR WALLET

CHOSEN WITH AN EYE FOR BEAUTY

ALL DIFFERENT!

6 for 1.00

12 for $2.00 Cash or Money Order. No C.O.D.

J. SANDLER, Dept. 2

138 DIVISION ST., NEW YORK 2, N.Y.

ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS

THE KIND MEN LIKE!

THE GIRLS LIKE IT TOO!!

(VEST POCKET SIZE)

They are loaded with rare cartoons. Full of Fun and Humor. *20 DIFFERENT* booklets sent for $1 in plain wrapper. No C.O.D.

BULCO, Dept. 336 Box 382-K., G.P.O., N.Y.C. 1

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Illustrated COMIC BOOKLETS
THE KIND GROWN-UPS LIKE!
Brand New Series, Clear Illustrations, Packed with Fun & Humor
10 for $1.00, 24 for $2.00
FREE Gift with each $2.00 order.
No C.O.D.
(VEST POCKET SIZE)
V. M. ROGERS
DEPT. F7, BOX 14738
CIMARRON STATION
LOS ANGELES 18, CALIF.

WHY CAN'T YOU ADVERTISE?

This is one inch of advertising space. It Costs only **$8.96** *and reaches more than 133,500 readers.* For complete information write to **Fiction Group, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 N. Wabash Avenue, Chicago 1, Ill.**

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Song Poems

SONG Poems Wanted, Broadcast consideration. Sooner Song Co., 22-CF Northwest 8th, Oklahoma City 2, Okla.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

IMPORT, export! Opportunity, profitable, world-wide, mail order business from home, without capital, or travel abroad. Established world trader ships instructions for no risk examination. Experience unnecessary. Free details. Mellinger, 171, Los Angeles, 24.

Miscellaneous

IF you have a hobby, or you collect special things, we will tell you how you may contact others of similar interests, add to your collection, exchange your duplicates etc. Ideas, A8. P.O. Box 7, Massapequa, N. Y.

CHECKERS, easily learned "easy way," checkers. Copr. 1952. 24 assorted games, openings. Something new, unique, $1.00. B. Stanfield, Box 1071, Mountain Home, Tenn.

FOR Sale: Fantastic, Weird, Scientifiction magazines and books. 1926-1948. Fred Claassen, 266 Mystic Ave., Cincinnati 16, O.

SELL uniforms & supplies. Big profits. Write: Hook-Fast, Dept. ZD, Roanoke, Va.

MAN to earn $90 week-up. Long needed invention. Advertised Post, Colliers, Country Gentleman. Prospects everywhere. Full or part time. Exclusive. No investment. Free samples. Write Red Comet, Inc., Dept. 95-C, Littleton, Colo.

WINTER in Florida! Work in Miami! Many jobs now open. List-$1. Box 33, Tamiami Station, Miami.

HOLLYWOODS best. Posed by master, 18 terrific shots $1.00. 36 for $2.00. All different. Perry Pelton, Box 5967, Dept. 160, Chicago 7, Ill.

SCIENTIFICTION weird, fantastic: books, magazines. Werewolf Bookshop, Shannon Rd. R.D. 2, Box 86, Verona, Pa.

"INTERESTING Mails."—25c will keep your mail box full three months. Bentz, Jr., Desk H-48, Chatawa, Miss.

START a Venetian Blind Laundry. Profit opportunity for lifetime business. New machine method. Free Booklet on request. L. A. Co., 442 N. Seneca, Wichita-12, Kans.

LETTERS remailed, 25c. Post cards, 10c. Evans, 184, Col's, O.

ADDRESS envelopes! We pay cash! Outfit, 25c! Hirsch, Spring Valley 6, N. Y.

RECEIVE big mail. Your name listed free. Box K-103, Salmon, Idaho.

BACK issues magazines supplied. Kovers, 850 Intervale Ave., New York, N. Y.

Space Problem

By E. BRUCE YACHES

THE LUNAR STATION radio room bore the silence of the tomb. Lanton's face was a mask of concentration. He sat in a crouching position before the equipment, looking like a gnome as his trained fingers toyed with the buttons and the dials. The phones clamped against his ears added to the illusion. Disgustedly he pulled them from his head and flung them on the bench.

"Take a crack at it, Larry," he said to the other operator who had been watching him, "see if you can raise the *Clarion*."

Larry shrugged: "O. K. But if you can't, what's the use. They simply aren't transmitting."

"The hell they aren't. No ship ever fails to pulse out right on the dot, if they have to burn out a generator." Lanton slammed the desk with his fist. "There are twenty families for the Colony aboard," he said softly.

Larry motioned him to be silent as he slipped the phones over his ears. His fingers turned the dial—the indicator slid across the band. Suddenly he stopped. His hand shot to "amplify" on the console. He listened tensely for three minutes. Finally he let out his breath in a sigh of relief. "O. K." he said, turning to Lanton, "they just pulled through an electric storm"...

A scene very like that may someday take place if what scientists now suspect is true. With radio-telescopes probing deep into Solar and inter-stellar space, it is suggested that terrific electrical storms must tear at the very fabric of space to cause the generation of radio signals which are detected, apparently *not* emanating from stars!

Naturally only speculation can be set forth here because until rockets are out in space no real data can be gathered. Nevertheless, there is good reason, through this radio investigation, to suspect that there are tremendous electrical disturbances in space which make our thunder-storms look like child's play.

The reaction of a space ship to an electrical storm may take one of two forms. If the storm is of the same general nature as those found in the atmosphere, essentially purely electrical phenomena, then the space-ship will come through without any difficulty at all since it is at the same potential or voltage as the space itself. Aircraft today go through gigantic electrical storms none the worse for the wear.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jets Away!

By ALLEN YERBY

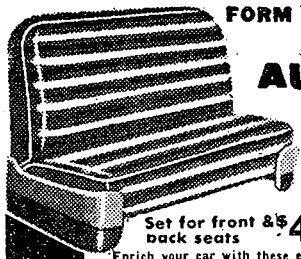
THE EVENTUAL ascendancy of the jet engine is assured—both for military and passenger aircraft. Not even considering the development of rockets, gas turbines and the like, and devoting our review solely to jet propelled airplanes, we can easily see evidence of certain trends. For one thing, most competent observers predict that within ten years—say by 1960—air transport speeds of sixteen to eighteen hundred miles an hour, will be routine! Enough now has been learned from the fitting of jets to conventional aircraft about the design of such supersonic planes, that we can get a good idea of what such future planes will look like.

For one thing, air resistance at such speeds is of prime importance. Therefore, the airframe must be designed to knife through the atmosphere with the minimum resistance. This means long tabular fuselages, pencil-shaped and needle-nosed, able to drive through the compressive effects of the air without piling up excessive shock waves. This speed also calls for small stubby wings, razor thin, designed for the maximum support but the minimum air resistance.

Complementing these changes in fuselages, is the development of powerful jet engines with much greater thrust than we now have. This is primarily a problem of metallurgy and applied physics, and we can see the developments taking place as they should. Certain auxiliary effects must be noted also. The throats into which the air for the jets are scooped must be glassy smooth and capable of drinking in vast gulps. Engines must be constructed like fine watches, and the problem of adequate cooling is paramount.

From the above considerations, we can form a pretty clear picture of the supersonic craft of the future. It is essentially a slim pencil-shaped cylinder, with short, thin wings driven by probably two jet engines, whose thrust will be measured in tons instead of pounds as we do now. To resist the tremendous stresses to which they are subjected, the aircraft will have skins of magnesium alloys quite thick, unlike the present sheet metal. The whole idea of an airframe coated with sheet metal will have gone by the board. Very likely, the entire shell of the super-sonic plane will be a huge casting—at the very least, a completely welded structure.

By that time, too, the rocket will have developed along similar lines, and perhaps it will be possible to convert such a transport plane into an ultimate Lunar rocket simply by changing the power from jet to rocket.



FORM FITTING, FULL TYPE
AUTO SEAT PLASTI-COVER
$2.98
Set for front & back seats $4.98
Enrich your car with these extraordinary covers. Not a THROW-TYPE, covers entire front seat. Waterproof, greaseproof, stainproof—Wipes clean with damp rag. Choose from our everlasting "TRU-TONE" colors in stripes, with maroon, blue, green, or gray background, or life-like leopard skin pattern. Give year and make of car, split or solid back and color desired.
The Liberty Bell, Dept.ZD-1, Elkins Park, Pa.

ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS
FOR GROWNUPS ONLY (Vest Pocket Size)
A NEW, DIFFERENT LINE of COMIC BOOKLETS for Adults. Loaded with FUN & HILARITY. Good Clear Illustrations. 20 Booklets all different Sent Prepaid for $1.00. No C.O.D.s please
TERRY THORNE Box 15535, Crenshaw Sta. Dept.F7, Los Angeles 8, Calif.

CARTOON'S PHOTO CARDS
They're terrific. Rich in fun as you like it. 3 different sets $1.—Men's Stories used books 20 for $2.—32 for $3. Literature, samples 30 cents.
SCHOLLMEYER BOX 48
BROOKLYN 25, NEW YORK

GET OUT OF DEBT!
WITHOUT BORROWING
NEW, practical PLAN explains HOW you can get out of financial difficulty! Pay off debts while you preserve your credit; free yourself from fear of legal action; avoid worry and embarrassment; enjoy peace of mind again! The PLAN is easy to understand and work, and followed sincerely, GUARANTEED to rid YOU of debts and end budget trouble, or money back! Rush only $1.00 for complete PLAN today!
M. W. GREENE • 1649, E. 60th St. • Long Beach 5, Calif.

STOP TOBACCO

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Redeemer. Write Today for free booklet telling of injurious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved over 300,000 people.
In Business Since 1909
THE NEWELL COMPANY
284 Clayton Sta. • St. Louis 5, Mo.
FREE BOOK

OWN a Business

If employed, start part time. Alert dealers can gross $5 hourly profit on own service plus $3 on EACH serviceman. Clean, revive, mothproof rugs & upholstery on location. No shop needed. Services nationally advertised. Repeat customers. Easy to learn. Quickly established. Easy terms. Send today for FREE booklet. No obligation.
DURACLEAN CO., 3-371 Duraclean Bldg., Deerfield, Ill.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

GOT ANY IDEAS?

Thru-out the U. S. there are thousands of fellows just bursting with ideas, good, bad and indifferent. The average guy is leery about discussing his "brain-child" for fear it might be absorbed. Fellows, you needn't be! You can definitely try to sell your idea without worrying about obtaining an immediate patent for protection. Too many good ideas fall by the wayside because of the expense involved in obtaining a patent. How many of you have seen new products come out and remarked—"For crying out loud, I thought about that thing 10 years ago". You don't have to put yourself in that position again. Now you can do something about your idea, when it's born. Don't let it die! $5.00 will show you how. To some of you, this may be the most important 5 bucks you ever spent.

M. LIEB, P. O. Box 5769,

Chicago 7, Illinois

HE - MAN VOICE!

STRENGTHEN your voice this tested scientific way. Yes—you may now be able to improve the POWER of your speaking and singing voice . . . in the privacy of your own room! Self-training lessons, mostly silent. No music required.

FREE BOOK Write TODAY for Eugene Feuchtinger's great booklet "How to Develop a Successful Voice." It's absolutely FREE! You must state your age. Booklet mailed postpaid in plain wrapper. No salesman will call. Send your name and age RIGHT NOW! Prefect Voice Institute, 210 S. Clinton St., Studio AX-56 Chicago 6, Ill.

QUIT TOBACCO!

Remove tobacco craving safely in every form and join the thousands who have completely obtained satisfactory freedom from tobacco with the old genuine TOBACCO BANISHER. Send for FREE BOOKLET describing the ill effects of tobacco and a safe reliable home method. A proven success for 40 years.

GUSTAF H. GUSTAFSON CO.

Box 168 Dept. F.G. Dalhart, Texas

MEXICO!

Letters remailed from the Republic of Mexico! Three for $1. Airmail, add 10c per letter. Do not place U. S. postage on letters to be remailed. Stamps of Mexico will be used.

FILMER

910-V MARION PHARR, TEXAS

DID YOU KNOW

that King David started it,—the ancients believed the Devil played it,—it was considered witchcraft for centuries,—and that today, this simple instrument which produces the most beautiful harmonic music without human aid, will amaze and mystify everyone? No electrical, moving, or costly parts,—just set instrument down and it will be played forever by unseen hands. Rare, unique,—your friends have never seen one. Send $.50 for complete history and construction details.

VICTORIA P. O. Box 25
Price Hill Sta. 5, Cincinnati, Ohio

ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS

Sell our ILLUSTRATED COMIC BOOKLETS and other NOVELTIES. Each booklet size 4½ x 2¾ and is fully illustrated. We will send 24 assorted booklets prepaid upon receipt of $1.00 or 60 assorted booklets sent prepaid upon receipt of $2.00. Wholesale novelty price list sent with order only. No orders sent C.O.D. Send Cash or Money-order.

REPSAC SALES CO., Dept. 140-Q
1 Orchard St. New York 2, N. Y.

Hail TO THE AMATEUR

By LEE GORDON

NO PROFESSIONAL in any field, astronomy, physics, chemistry, telescope construction—you name it—approaches his task with more zeal than his amateur cohort. Amateur scientists are a breed apart. The world amateur stems from "love" and amateurs are lovers with all that term implies in the way of verve and enthusiasm and drive. Amateurs in science, from radiomen to seismologists, have made their mark—not even mathematics has escaped the effective hand of the amateur. As a general rule, professionals welcome amateurs, for more than one amateur has outgrown his status and shown the professionals the way.

The latest scientific work to be invaded by the amateur is—of all things—rocketry! Actually it is an error to put it that way, for the first practical development of rocketry both here and in Germany was in the hands of amateurs, as Willy Ley has amply demonstrated. And we are all aware of the fruits of that work, culminating in the V-2—and others. But, strictly speaking, we ordinarily think, rocketry has "grown up", has become a large branch of technology completely in the hands of the professionals.

Not exactly . . .

Four times a year, in the heart of the Mojave Desert, the Pacific Rocket Society and the Reaction Research Society, both amateur groups, build, operate and control small-scale rockets, emulating in every respect their bigger brothers. Crouched behind blockhouses, they trace their rockets with homemade radars and telescopes, recover the equipment with built-in instruments, and in general conduct their work in precisely the fashion of, say, White Sands.

The rockets used by the amateurs are, of course, limited in scope. They are for the most part powder-powered affairs, suitable for no real altitude work, nor for guided missile use, because their range is much too limited, but it is still possible to get worth-while data from these simple rockets, even though they don't compare with their liquid-fueled brothers.

Actually, because of the large number and variety of rockets used and methods of testing worked, the data from these amateur operations are recorded as of value to the Services. Rocketry is in its infancy and it is impossible to learn too much.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

$15.20 an hour!

This is the average earning reported by Presto salesman WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS. "The sky's the limit" on Presto profits because of America's serious need for this new fire extinguishing discovery.

WOULDN'T YOU like to be making the kind of money Stanley Hyman made? His story printed at right is just one example of the brilliant success that Presto salesmen are meeting everywhere! A Florida salesman earned $600 in one month. An Ohio man earned $2100 in 2 months. A New York salesman earned $1500 in one month. A New Hampshire salesman added the Presto as a sideline and picked up an extra $1800 in 20 months.

What Is the Secret?

PRESTO contains an amazing new chemical—"Chlorobromomethane" or "C.B." developed as a secret defense against fire during the war.

In comparing effectiveness of "C.B." in fighting various kinds of fires an authoritative testing laboratory report states: "It has been proved that 'C.B.' is about 1.5 to 6 times as effective as other common extinguishing agents on an equal weight basis."

This extra effectiveness of "C.B." means that Presto can be made light and handy enough for even a woman or child to use. Just a twist of the knob...and flames disappear! "Sells on sight" to Civil defense workers, owners of homes, cars, stores, farms, service stations, boats, motorcycles, factories, offices.

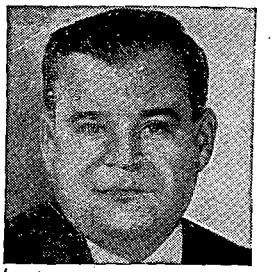
Why Large Presto Profits Are So Easy

Everyone is terrified at the very thought of FIRE! Every year fire kills more than 11,000 people. Over half women and children! Civilian Defense authorities have said that in the event of atomic attack regular fire fighting forces will be fighting large fires and that the people must be equipped to take care instantly of the little fire that might so easily become a big one. Most people who see Presto in action want one or more—ESPECIALLY WHEN THE PRICE IS ONLY $3.98 EACH!

Over One Million Prestos Already Sold!

You can demonstrate Presto in a few minutes, and every sale will net you $1 or more. We re-fill your Demonstrator free and give you dramatically powerful printed sales material to "talk from"...free certificates testifying that Presto is GUARANTEED FOR 20 YEARS.

YOU DON'T NEED TO INVEST A PENNY. Just collect and keep $1 or more every time you write an order—we collect the balance and deliver the extinguisher. (Or if you wish, you can buy from us at extra-low wholesale prices and then make up to $2.18 profit per unit supplying both dealers and retail customers—we'll send you free details.)



WILLIAM F. WYDALLIS

"Most specialty salesmen are always on the lookout for a 'natural'. The 'natural' of this decade is the PRESTO FIRE EXTINGUISHER... because it is handy in size, simple to operate and in the right price range.

For every hour I have devoted to the Presto, I find that I have earned an average of $15.20 an hour. I am now convinced that extraordinary money can be made in this safety field. I am devoting more of my time to this product now since I have discovered that the earnings on this item are greater than any item I have handled in the past."

—William F. Wydallis
Van Wert, Ohio

CHARLES KAMA

This Presto salesman from Texas was featured as "Salesman of the Month" on the front cover of a sales magazine. He told the magazine's reporter: "I think I've succeeded pretty well. I'm making more than a thousand dollars a month—and I haven't touched bottom yet."

Only Presto Has All These Features

- Ends Fire as Fast as 2 Seconds
- Chemical Contents 1.5 to 6 Times More Effective than Others on an Equal Weight Basis
- Weighs Less Than 1 lb.
- Easily Held in One Hand—Even by a Child
- Needs No Inspection or Re-Charging—Does Not Corrode or Deteriorate
- Costs Only $3.98—Yet Out-Performs Bulky Extinguishers costing Several Times as Much
- Automatic Pressure—No Pumping
- Guaranteed for 20 years—Certificate Is Packed with Every Presto

START NOW MAIL COUPON

Get started in this rich new field now. Don't "put it off"! Every day you hesitate may cost you $10, $15, or even $50 you could otherwise be making. Mail the coupon at right NOW for everything you need to get started right away. **MERLITE INDUSTRIES, Inc., Dept. 231, 201 East 16th Street, New York 3, N. Y.**

Best Selling Months Just Ahead!

Don't Delay—MAIL Coupon Now!

MERLITE INDUSTRIES, Inc., Dept. 231,
201 East 16th Street, New York 3, N. Y.

Please send me illustrated sales literature, liberal profit plan, order blanks—everything I need to get started making good money introducing the Presto Fire Extinguisher in my locality.

☐ **CHECK HERE IF YOU WISH TO ORDER A REGULAR PRESTO TO BE USED AS A DEMONSTRATOR** ($2.50). Pays for itself many times over in increased sales. Can be returned as often as you like for FREE re-fill. You needn't enclose any money now—we'll send Demonstrator C.O.D. (Or if you wish to save money, enclose $2.50 and we'll pay postage.)

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone No. (if any) ..... State .....

IN CANADA: Mopa Co., Ltd., 371 Dowd St., Montreal 1, P. Q.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In Your Mind's Eye

The Secret of MENTAL CREATING

IF you just like to dream, read no further. There comes a time when your fancies *must be* brought into light—and stand the test of every-day, hard realities. Are you one of the thousands—perhaps millions—whose thoughts never get beyond the stage of *wistful wishing?* Do you often come to from a daydream with the sigh, "If only I could bring it about—*make it real?*"

All things begin with thought—it is what follows that may take your life out of the class of those who hope and dream. Thought energy, like anything else, can be dissipated—or it can be made to produce actual effects. *If you know how to place your thoughts* you can stimulate the creative processes within your mind—through them you can assemble things and conditions of your world into a happy life of accomplishment. *Mental creating* does not depend upon a magical process. It consists of *knowing how* to marshal your thoughts into a power that draws, compels and organizes your experiences into a worth-while design of living.

ACCEPT THIS *Free* BOOK

Let the Rosicrucians tell you how you may accomplish these things. The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization), a world-wide philosophical fraternity, have preserved for centuries the ancients' masterful knowledge of the functioning of the inner mind of man. They have taught men and women how to use this knowledge to *recreate their lives.* They offer you a free copy of the fascinating book, "The Mastery of Life." It tells how you may receive this information for study and use. Use coupon opposite.

SCRIBE: M.W.H.
The Rosicrucians (AMORC),
San Jose, California.

Please send free copy of "The Mastery of Life," and I shall read it as directed.

Name.....

Address.....

City.....

The ROSICRUCIANS
(AMORC)
SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED